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AMERICAN LANDSCAPES

IN

NATURE AND ART

BY

W. H. DOWNES



ILLUSTRATED BY A. H. BICKNELL

2712

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TO

"THE GROUP"

OF KINDRED SPIRITS WHO USED TO MEET IN BICKNELL'S
STUDIO TO TALK ABOUT ART, IN AN ATMOSPHERE
OF GOOD FELLOWSHIP AND TOBACCO SMOKE.



INTRODUCTION.

IN these sketches, which were written out of doors, I have first endeavored to record in appropriate words the impressions caused by the actual landscapes spread out before my eyes, somewhat as the landscape painter would record his impressions in his language. Then I have ventured to recall the works of certain painters whose canvases have been brought to mind by a sight of Nature. It may be considered rash to bring together in this way famous names and some which are almost unknown to the great world; but an art critic should be ready to incur such a risk, if he has any convictions, and surely he may never feel safer than when judging men's works by the standard of Nature.

It would not be the easiest thing in the world to determine which method of suggesting Nature

INTRODUCTION.

is the more difficult, the painter's or the writer's. At best, no one can give more than a hint. Cold types and rebellious pigments alike are inadequate means of expression.

The simplest rustic subjects have seemed the best, because they are the most familiar. It is hoped that some of these sketches may appeal by their truthfulness to the reader's pleasant memories. But the whole value of the work, if it has any value, lies in its tendency, in what it merely hints at, — the great desirability, for instance, of using one's own eyes and of cultivating one's powers of observation; for how much of pleasure and profit this might add to the lives of most people, no matter in what particular sphere of action they may be placed!

We see what we look for. It is best to be on the watch for beauty, and to let none of it escape our vigilance.

W. H. D.

SUTHERLAND ROAD,
BOSTON, April, 1891.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
✓ A DAY IN JUNE	17
✓ ON THE RIVER	30
✓ THE EVERLASTING HILLS	43
✓ BY THE SHORE	54
✓ THE ABANDONED FARMHOUSE	67
✓ IN FIELD AND MEADOW	76
✓ THE THUNDER STORM	89
✓ SUNSET EFFECTS	102
✓ IN THE WOODS	115
✓ MOODS OF THE SEA	129
✓ NOCTURNE	145
✓ THE BEAUTY OF COMMON THINGS	159
✓ THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE ART	170



A DAY IN JUNE

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colors and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.

— WORDSWORTH.



A DAY IN JUNE.

IT has stormed at intervals during six days and nights. The wind has been blowing more or less sourly from the east. Heavy rains have fallen ; thick fogs hung over the water ; the surf roared loudly in the night, and a gale, swept in from the Atlantic, howled about the house most dismally and monotonously for twenty-four hours. The whole world seemed

dark and chilly ; the summer's face was hid ; and every one longed for the light and warmth of the sun.

This morning, lo ! a dazzling, sparkling, flashing, glittering stream of welcome sunlight flooded the glad earth and the laughing ocean ; the birds sang with an unwonted exuberance on all sides ; and the scent of sweetness and the softness of the airs that blew over the meadows proclaimed unmistakably that the wind was in the west. Thus began this day of rare beauty. The rain has refreshed the grass and foliage, which have taken on richer tints of green ; the face of the landscape appears washed clean ; in all the roads the dust has been laid ; and there is a wonderful clarity in the atmosphere, which to breathe is a joy.

Great masses of white clouds move across the sky. At one moment the sun is obscured, the next it bursts forth again brighter than before. Between the ragged lines of the flying vapors the blue upper sky is bluer than men dare paint it. One exquisite effect of light and shade after another comes and goes from moment

to moment. The gentle breeze rustles softly through the grove; the tall trees whisper a liquid lullaby, and swing their topmost branches in a capricious rhythm, as full of natural grace as the rise and fall of the sea's waves or the undulations of a field of rye. Down in the swamp the *fleurs de lis* are royally adorning the bright day, and beneath the rank tufts of verdure the frogs twang out their 'cello solos of batrachian satisfaction.

How handsome the moist brown earth is in a ploughed field! This one has a color richer than chocolate in some lights, and the slope is fine. On one edge of the field is a row of low quince trees still in blossom, and at the base of the rickety rail fence grow ferns and wild geraniums among the tall grasses and weeds. An unpainted barn, of proportions more generous than those of the owner's house, shows





its weather-stained walls and roof above the hill, and higher still rise the noble aged forms of two tall cottonwood trees whose leaves are full of murmurous confidences. Here is the familiar spot where the road to the shore makes a pretty bend, and, descending a little hill, forks, and is lost to view. A group of scraggy apple-trees stands, or rather crouches, alongside the stone-wall at the

bend, and casts pleasant shades upon the inviting grassy bank beneath.

As their limbs overhang the highway, it may be presumed that they furnish more fruit to the vagrant, and the perpetually hungry small boy, than to their owner. In good apple years, however, the farmers are glad to have all comers help themselves; for apples are then almost as cheap as water in many parts of New England.





Down where the big willow trees droop over the little pond, the cows have come to take their morning cocktails. Their rich red hides make superb pictures, wherever they go, against the

green background. If cows are more contented at any one given time than at another, this must be a season of especial comfort for them, before the voracious flies and the great heats of mid-summer have come to torment their patient souls. I never see a group of these decorative philosophers under a tree without thinking of Johnny Johnston, and it is the same with all who are familiar with his masterly cattle pictures. Nothing could testify more eloquently to the truth of his works than this involuntary reference to them in the very presence of Nature.

Near midday, without warning, arrives a sudden shower, which passes quickly. Now the sky assumes new shapes of wonder in the south, hangs out fresh banners of glorious hues. Stately cumuli sail eastward, luminous like sun-touched snowbanks as to their tops, purple and blue and lilac beneath, with spaces of unspeakably delicate gray. Reaches of tender blue appear between the shining peaks of this aerial Oberland; the cloud-shadows chase one another across the fields and across the water; the distant

shower slants its azure veil athwart the hills, while on either side the lovely amber sunlight falls on the brilliant damp green fields, the sombre mass of the forest, the white sand of the beach, and the far-off red lighthouse at the end of the breakwater. What a pageant, what a treat for the eyes! Everything shines.' The air is full of life. Turn which way you will, the pictures are full of beauty. This is June, the youngest of the sisterhood of summer months, — capricious, changeful, and adorable.

Among all the landscape artists known to fame, there is none capable of translating all the freshness, the sweetness, the intoxication of such a day. Corot got up early in the morning and was at work before the night fog had cleared away, consequently he saw everything through gray spectacles; moreover, he never saw New England at all, and had he seen her in such a vivid, gay, chromatic aspect as she wears to-day, I suspect he would have thought her loud. Constable was one of the few men who could paint changeable weather, and came very close to the truth of England's fickle cli-

mate ; were he living Yankee instead of dead Briton, I would sooner commission him to paint an impression of the celestial carnival going on to-day than Claude Lorrain or Turner. Not even Ruysdael, giant as he was, whose name I never hear without mentally taking off my hat, not even the great Ruysdael could cope with Nature in such a frolicsome mood. We might recall a long list of names, and after all shake our heads at the end of it. Hobbema, Pousin, Gainsborough, Rousseau, Dupré, Daubigny, Courbet, Hunt, Inness, marshal them all in imposing array, and say whether they are great enough to paint the song of a bird, the scent of a hawthorn blossom, the breezy call of incense-breathing morn. It is surely no depreciation of their well-earned fame to pronounce them unequal to the task. All of these landscapists are men of great achievements in their respective fields, yet I dare say they all have known at times what it is to wrestle mightily with Nature and to be thrown. For my part, I am devoutly thankful to each and all of them for the few shreds and fragments they have

been able to preserve for us of the boundless, indescribable, and transcendent beauties of the rural world. It is enough glory for the greatest of them that they could merely suggest a gleam of sunlight, or the flutter of a leafy bough, or the slow, lifting movement of a billow on the sea. If you were to ask one of these painters what he had accomplished in his lifetime of toil and study and observation, he would probably say that he had been enabled to give a few slight hints as to the true aspect of Nature. That is enough, and the verdict must be: Well done.

The golden hours of the afternoon go by with magic rapidity, and the evening's approach is hardly perceived. The going-down of the sun is a quiet affair, with no flame of color; in the west is a modest, ruddy token of good night, and interlacing bars of brass tremble in the level backgrounds of the sea for a while, till presently the moon peers from beyond the rim of the southeast, and disputes with vagrant clouds the rule of the night. Over the vast bosom of the waters hangs a mysterious half-

light, in which the bats wheel their devious ways, as busily, as blindly, and as aimlessly, perchance, as we mortals pursue our progress through the mystery of our life. There is something so unreal in the quality of moonshine that it makes our hold upon the material facts of the world seem feebler than by day. Nevertheless, it is always pleasant to see the moon prevail in its contest with the clouds. So now it comes forth full and clear, sending its silver track across the waves, gleaming pale upon the sail of yonder ghostly sloop, caressing the lawns and grassy slopes, making deeper the shadows everywhere. "Even the little valleys joy to glisten in her sight."

I know three pictures of moonlight in which the naked truth seems to have been caught on the wing. Alexander Harrison's "Crépuscule" and D. Jerome Elwell's "Moonrise, Holland," are honors to American art. Daubigny painted a fine moonrise, which was among the pictures sold by M. Achille Oudinot in Boston in 1886; this was one of those marvels of rapid work in which Daubigny showed himself the peer of the

greatest landscapists that ever lived, and seemed to reveal, as by an intuition, the inmost secrets of the country's heart.





ON THE RIVER.

THE sun has got behind the long, wood-covered range of hills that borders the western bank of the river, so that nearly half the stream flows in an opulent shadow, where my boat drifts with a delicious leisure. From north to south the river makes a wide and graceful bend, sweeping in majestic silence seaward. Of the eastern shore I will say nothing except that there is a railroad there. The trees and

grass have done their best to hide the unseemly gashes cut by shovel and pick in the virgin slopes. There are places where the woods stoop over to see themselves reflected in distorted shapes in the looking-glass that Mother Eve used.

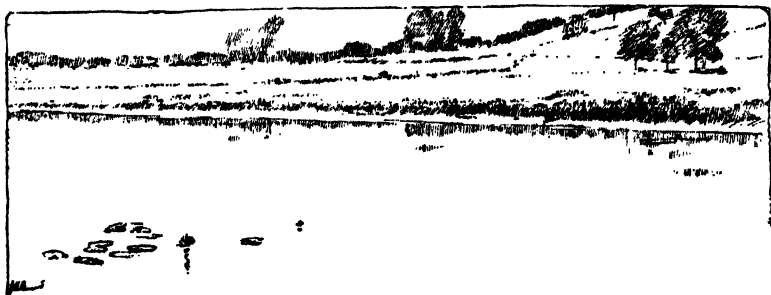
“Inverted in the tide

Stand the gray rocks, and trembling shadows throw,
And the fair trees look over, side by side,
And see themselves below.”

At one point a little brook, hardly stout enough to babble, slides down over mossy ledges from a neighboring spring, and loses itself in the bigger waters. I am downright sorry that truth obliges me to refrain from calling it a babbling brook, and that a conscientious regard for literal fact compels the acknowledgment that it is so insignificant as not even to gurgle or murmur or purl. Nevertheless 'tis a pretty brooklet, and may not always be so dumb. There is mention in the first act of “*Les Huguenots*” of a certain *ruisseau* which *murmures à peine*. Near by is a steep, rocky promontory from which the boys dive. The

channel makes close by the shore, and the water is more than twenty feet deep here. Its surface is black and smooth, and it looks treacherous. A boy was drowned here once, but that does not prevent the thoughtless youngsters of to-day from enjoying their swimming baths in the same sombre spot. It is a fine, exhilarating sight to watch their supple young bodies as they plunge from the top of the rock, cleave the dark water, and shoot downward till they are lost to view in the depths, only to emerge, buoyant as corks and noisy with animal spirits, grasping a handful of mud or sand to prove that they have been to the bottom. Hunt's painting of "The Bathers" is a very vivid realization of such a scene, where the rich darkness of a well-shaded pool sets off the handsome lustre of the wet flesh of a couple of athletic youths. The associations connected with the place where one took the first swimming lessons are likely to be agreeable. How these rocks and hills were wont to echo our splashings and our shouts of boyish glee in the old days! Now there is a new set of boys, with a

new assortment of natatorial tricks, a fresh vocabulary of slang, strange*faces. Stay, there is one sturdy fellow who has the features and the gait of Ned T., who was killed at Spottsylvania. Can it be his—grandson? It seems not longer ago than yesterday when Ned and I were sporting together in this familiar locality:—



“Cease; thou know’st,
He dies to me again, when talk’d of.”

Now let the boat go with the current down to where the stream runs between broad meadows in which elms grow, the hills recede, and gray farmhouses and barns dot the broad peaceful intervale. Between low shores like these, the river meanders more lazily, fringed with

rushes, flags, and rank-smelling weeds, among which water-fowl hide. Beyond this wide and placid reach the bed of the stream narrows, and a gradual acceleration in the current's movement marks the approach to a tortuous, rough defile, hemmed in by rocky heights. Deep and swift the water glides between the stern granite gates of the gorge, washing the base of the cliff called Lover's Leap which rises abruptly on the west bank. The vague legend, of pretended Indian origin, which gives this romantic name to the steep, is slimly "founded on fact," it is to be suspected; and in this respect it is like many similar tales of the aborigines. The wild character of the scene is suggestive of Fenimore Cooper's stories, however, and this would be a fitting place to read of the adventures of the Pathfinder. From a pictorial point of view, the roughness of the country, the density of the primitive woods that crown the rocks, and the strength of the torrent that rushes and tumbles over its harsh bed below, recall the rude and sturdy landscapes of Gustave Courbet among the Vosges mountains.

There is more than one cove where the sunlight never comes, and black pools, haunted by in-



numerable fish, sleep in perpetual shadow. In the seams and crannies of the precipice, mosses, fern, and stunted cedars find a precarious foot-

hold. It would hardly surprise one to see golden-haired Lorelei emerge from the twilight depths of the stream to lure the traveller to amorous death in the dark swirl of the rapids.

Another corner is turned, and the flood lies shining once more in full sunlight, for so suddenly does the scene change: it is with the river as with mortals — it is ever the same, yet none of its days or hours are alike.

What means this slow advance, this expanding of the shores, and the dull roar that comes to our ears from below? The round-topped hills encircle no less than a lake; trees stand a fathom deep under water; and the basin seems fuller than nature meant it to be. Down the stream there is an abrupt and untimely end to all this placidity, where a long curved dam lets fall the unsuspecting sheet of water and breaks its smooth face into a foamy chaos, noisy, lawless, turbulent, — a vulgar Niagara. The dull roar has grown into a continuous and mighty thunder. From the apron of the dam the disconcerted river flees wildly in a thousand amber eddies, and in shame and confusion slips between

foul banks lined with clattering mills whose subterranean race-ways discharge their prostituted, soiled, and enslaved contents back to the indignant bosom of the mother-stream. Thus is the river subjugated by man's arts and turned to the uses of business: its purity sullied, its peace destroyed, its beauty disregarded, its power alone respected. But it has within itself that blessed faculty of letting bygones be bygones, of filtering away and leaving behind it all noisome sediments, — that forgetfulness of evil characteristic of healthy temperaments. Every surrounding soon becomes rustic and cleanly again. Limpid brooks bring their icy tribute; the sun sends down its tenderest shafts of warmth to cheer the ill-used waters; soft westerly breezes stir the grave face of the saddened stream to a reluctant smile. Flowing so through many miles of wood and farm and hill, under consoling skies, the river comes at last to the lovely village of Wapawoag, where no wonder it is content to linger long. A perpetual Sabbath reigns in Wapawoag, and the river is its prophet. No mills, no dams, no noise, no dirt, no business here. At

intervals the plainest of wooden bridges spans the river, and there is usually a motionless, rapt, credulous fisherman fishing from each bridge, from which he dangles his ill-shod feet. In round-shouldered expectancy he hangs over the particular pool presumed to contain countless perch, and yet who has ever seen him catch anything?

On one side of the river a wide, elm-shaded road runs north and south, lined with houses built in the eighteenth century, several of which are the homes of retired sea-captains. The long, sloping roof, the heavy timbers, the absence of verandas, the unhewn stone which serves as the lower step to the narrow porch, the grotesque, old knocker, and the bit of tin which makes rusty proclamation that the dwelling is insured, —all this announces plainly that we are in the presence of an old settler. The unkempt garden, all overgrown with vagabond vines, raspberry bushes, and shaggy weeds, extends back of such a venerable mansion to the edge of the river, where a century-old willow bends over the water, with a crazy skiff moored to a ring



in its scarred trunk. Just above this neglected garden, which the bees have all to themselves through long days together, stands the ancient store, which stood in the same spot in the year 1776, and doubtless held the same variegated stock of goods, including the best of New England rum, the same that the sea-captains used to drink as they sat in the back room stormy nights and spun yarns of their prodigious exploits in the war of 1812, when Wapawoag was a thriving seaport and fitted out privateers to prey upon the commerce of England. There is a picturesque, irregular foot-bridge near the store, connecting that centre of trade and local news with the handsome "place" of a rich Bostonian who passes the six months from April till October on the west shore of the river, in a red villa surrounded by wide verandas, from which a smooth-shaven lawn slopes very gradually down to the water. Pretty maidens and athletic manly youths play tennis here, in becoming white flannel costumes, and wake the echoes with their cries and laughter. On moonlight evenings the river overhears

some foolish talk in the coquettish Whitehall boat, but it never betrays these summer secrets confided to it, maintaining to the end its sage policy of forgetfulness. I would that my poor pen were capable of describing in adequate terms the hundred beautiful pictures made by the river in its progress through the sweet old town, — that last *étape* in its march to the sea. All its memories at last are drowned in the ocean, its identity is lost, it becomes a mere drop in the world's bucket, a nameless part of the infinite deep.





THE EVERLASTING HILLS.

ALL generous natures love the hills. The love of liberty flourishes in high place. Tyrants could never enslave the mountaineer. Switzerland must ever be a republic. The Scotch highlanders are invincible friends of freedom. In our own country slavery an

rebellion could not get a foothold in the loyal mountains of West Virginia and East Tennessee. It is useless to multiply instances, because history is so full of eloquent illustrations that volumes would be needed to set forth the virtue and liberality of the dwellers on the heights. It is not hard to appreciate and pity the proverbial homesickness of the wandering Swiss; and who, except a railroad contractor, does not abhor a flat country? Thank Heaven that New England is no dreary, endless prairie, no monotonous plain. Surely no one can accuse our domain of a want of diversity. From the St. Lawrence to Long Island Sound it is an almost uninterrupted succession of rugged hills, with peaceful valleys lying between. All our hills have certain characteristics in common, and the giants of the Presidential range are but exaggerated types of their kind. Their pre-eminence, however, is undisputed and indisputable. There is nothing finer in all the poetry relating to mountains than that proud soliloquy which Emerson puts into the mouth of Mount Monadnock, beginning:—

"Every morn I lift my head,
Gaze on New England underspread. . . ."

The consciousness of might, the superb calm of acknowledged power and dominion, the lofty disdain of a Titan for the pigmies that fret and fume at his feet, all this and more is expressed in the grim, quaint speech of the mountain. Everything is relative, so that Mount Washington, who would be a very petty prince indeed among the Alps, is every inch a king in New Hampshire. I pity all those persons



who do not know the White Mountain region. It is not the height in feet and inches of these overgrown hills, nor their supply of midsummer snow, which is apt to run short in a hot August; it is the nameless charm of a locality unlike any other, at once wild and suave, full of piquant contrasts, affording opportunities for ambitious alpestrians to break their necks; for mediocre landscape-painters to betray their incompetency; for meditative people to "loaf, and invite their souls"; for amateur pedestrians to discover how long a mile is; and for all comers to breathe an air as exhilarating as champagne and a vast deal purer.

It is a well-known fact that the highest mountains do not command the most pleasing prospects, nor are they always imposing in proportion to their size. A tumble from the cliff that frowns over Tuckerman's Ravine would doubtless be just as fatal as a fall from the top of the Matterhorn. What is sublimity? I have been more frightened by a thunderstorm on the summit of Mount Clinton than I was on the precarious peak of the Wetterhorn;



THE EVERLASTING HILLS.

and there is no reason for doubting that the discharge of a pailful of suds on to an ant-hill is as grave an event for the ants as the flood was to Noah and his contemporaries.

The mountains excite the imagination more deeply than any other natural objects ; not because of their dimensions and forms so much as because there is always a farther side to them which we do not see. The mind is affected by the unknown, and eagerly believes it to be more wonderful, more pleasant, than the known. After you have ascended to the top of a hill, it has no more secrets for you, and you are *désillusionné*. When clouds hide the upper part of a mountain, it seems higher than when all the peak is visible. I remember seeing, in the valley which leads up to the village of Zermatt, the lower portion of a great glacier nearly overhead which had the appearance of hanging from the very sky, — a spectacle so startling and awful that in the few minutes it was visible it became more vividly impressed upon my memory than the aspect of Monte Rosa itself in all its majesty. Probably one of

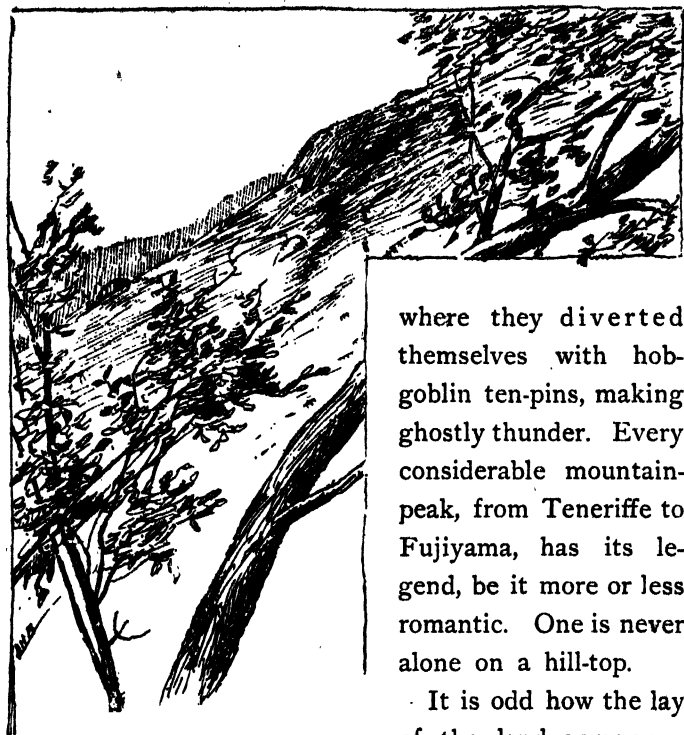


the reasons that almost all pictures of mountains are so unsatisfactory is the want of this potent element of mystery. It is not the only reason, and yet it is not easy to explain in so many words why objects, grand in themselves, should not be successfully painted, provided always that the artist attempting the

task be fitly inspired. Our hills have tempted many capable pencils, but the results of all endeavors have not added to the fame of American

art, nor have they exalted the glory of the hills. Church travelled to the Andes, Bierstadt to the Rocky Mountains, as if the humblest hummock of our land would not have been enough to give them pause. The best impression of a mountainous district that I have seen was a large study by Daubigny, which represented the sterile slope of a huge eminence in the Pyrenees. It was a suggestion. Without trying to be a picture, it gave the massive structure of the subject. There was nothing in the least scenic in it ; it was not even agreeable ; but to one who knows the austere solitude, the solemn grandeur of such high places, it was striking for its simple and unalloyed truthfulness. It conveyed a sense of isolation which was almost oppressive.

The once inaccessible tops of the loftiest peaks among the Alps were peopled, in the fancy of the peasants, with imps and gnomes, who rolled down stones and started frightful avalanches to scare away climbers who attempted to scale those accursed heights. Rip Van Winkle found Hudson's phantom crew among the granite fastnesses of the Catskills,



where they diverted themselves with hobgoblin ten-pins, making ghostly thunder. Every considerable mountain-peak, from Teneriffe to Fujiyama, has its legend, be it more or less romantic. One is never alone on a hill-top.

It is odd how the lay of the land causes a small elevation to command a handsome view. Nothing is so genial and pretty to look down on as a wide valley watered by a sinuous creek and cut up into a patchwork of cultivated fields,

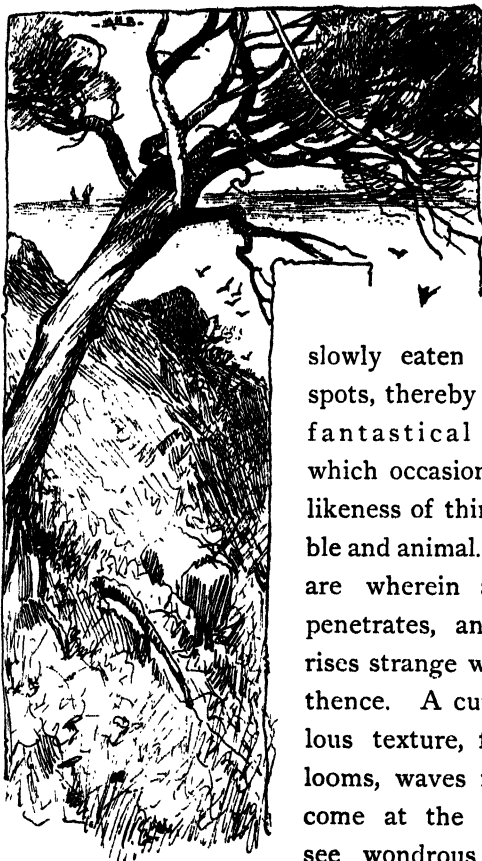
with here and there a farm-house surrounded by its cluster of barns and outbuildings, and shaded by its great trees. A crop of buckwheat or a freshly ploughed field gives a pleasant accent of variety among the rich greens of pastures and of woods. The white steeple of the meeting-house is seldom lacking in the view. I have heard an artist say that white buildings did not look well in a landscape, but I must disagree with him on that point. There was a time when all country houses in New England were painted white with green blinds—that is, all those that were painted at all. The custom was so nearly universal that, when the reaction came, it was too violent; and to-day, white is the least popular of paints for outside work; but it is not a risky prophecy to say that the day will come when white will not be so scorned. There are already indications that the absolute rule of red and yellow is becoming wearisome. The old-fashioned, rambling, manorial farm-house, as white as paint can make it, never looks out of place either embowered in green foliage, or lifting its dazzling façade to meet the deep blue of the morning sky.



BY THE SHORE.

THE sound of the surf upon the rocks at times is soothing and musical; but there are other times when it becomes almost frightful, and the solid earth itself seems to tremble under its regular blows. The days of fair weather, of sunshine, and soft southwesterly breezes are most becoming to the shore, and bring out its colors best. Ours is, as Mrs. Hemans very justly remarked, "a stern and rock-bound coast"; and harsh as those lofty and jagged cliffs, with the white line of breakers at their feet, must appear to mariners in





danger of coming ashore, they are really as picturesque, and often as grandiose, as anything in our scenery.

The sea has slowly eaten away their soft spots, thereby modelling most fantastical protuberances which occasionally take on the likeness of things both vegetable and animal. Caverns there are wherein a strange light penetrates, and as the tide rises strange wild noises issue thence. A curtain of marvellous texture, from mermaids' looms, waves in graceful welcome at the portal. Divers see wondrous sights at the bottom of the sea, but, after

all, not more beautiful than those we see on the surface.

The alternation of rock with sand and an occasional headland where woods rise above smooth pastures at a short distance from the shore form the most attractive kind of coast, though there are those that are bolder and grander. Cape Ann is a good type of the class, and, take it all in all, the North Shore has no superior, though no part of the New England seaboard is wanting in agreeable features of its own. A long, wide, level sweep of hard, white sand is a perpetual delight, particularly for the fanatical bather, but its glare is nearly intolerable in the middle of a cloudless day, and one willingly seeks the nooks that abound among the gray barnacled granite chaos that re-echoes the salute of the sounding main. In such a spot the ebb and flow of the tides seems doubly rapid and mysterious. Peninsulas become islands, and islands vanish, as the eager waters climb, swirling in sombre crannies, retreating only to advance higher. The flood tide gives the neater aspect of affairs, but low tide is richer in matters for study, and un-

covers a wealth of colors in brown and yellow sea-weed and red rock and blue mud and bed of vivid eel-grass. It is interesting to watch the work of the salt water and its creatures upon the neutral zone betwixt high and low water marks ; to walk over countless pebbles



polished smooth as pearls, of forms more varied than the art of man might invent, and of colors dull and bright to rival gems of purest ray serene ; treasures which the children, more wise than we, collect and value as if they were the peers of the Koh-i-noor diamond ; to inhale the dank odor of the kelp, uprooted from its deep home and flung upon the sands to be devoted to

the most ignoble uses ; to startle to wriggling life the myriad little dwellers in the warm shallows ; to shake the well-knit cerulean ooze, whence shoots in a thin stream the *jet d'eau* of the clam ; to mark the gradual encroachment of barnacles and slime and rock-weed by which the sea writes its careless signature upon its



conquests. What is there, of all things, that is not, sooner or later, washed ashore on a sea-beach ? There are whole communities upon our coast subsisting, a good part of the year round, upon the sad business of wrecking ; and I have heard of a British brig which came ashore in Maine, being prematurely abandoned by the

crew, which was "cleaned out" by the wreckers in a night, while the sailors were hospitably entertained at the houses of the honest toilers of the sea. Many innocent-looking fishermen live less upon their ostensible catch than upon the more or less lawful flotsam and jetsam coming their way. Dwellers inland can have but a faint idea of the amount of "plunder" fetched ashore by almost every tide, even in pleasant weather, on certain favored shores. The lives of some lighthouse keepers would possibly be a trifle monotonous if it were not for this source of excitement; but think of a day which yielded one twenty-pound tub of butter (in good condition); one straw mattress (suspected and turned afloat again); one huge tree trunk direct from South America or the Antilles, riddled with thousands of worm-holes; one section of a mahogany cabin table, with a finely carved leg; one empty beer bottle; a part of a jointed fish pole; enough wood to light fires for a week in easterly weather; and a broken book-cover with the following remnant of a title:—

Voy
OF
SCHOONER
ELIZA J
RICHARD COGGE
OF
NEW
FROM
1789 TO

What voyages the schooner *Eliza Jane* sailed between 1789 and the year of her demise may be imagined only, for the fragment of binding contains no pages of the narrative which once filled the volume. No doubt her bones lie rotting on some foreign coast, and her master's fill a peaceful Yankee grave within view of the blue water. The deeds of both may be surmised. He was a big, bluff, hearty man, was Captain Richard ; a mighty drinker of Medford rum ; a terror to English merchantmen in the war of 1812 ; and I warrant you he fetched more than one prize into port in the brave days of old, when schooners of two hundred and fifty tons used to go 'round the Horn, and

privateers no bigger than our Puritans and Mayflowers of to-day would chase and board and capture British ships right under the noses of their frigates. I do not cite the list of things picked up alongshore because of their great value, though there are worse finds than a tub of butter, — A 1, “gilt-edged” Vermont butter, worth at least thirty cents a pound, — but mainly because things thrown up by the chances of wind, tide, and current on the beach are so suggestive, having histories and a look of having travelled far many of them, and of having seen strange sights and passed through odd vicissitudes. Most of them, too, are incomplete, and such tales as they tell are very sketchy. One has to supply a good deal of the color for one’s self. Still, the yarn of the carved table-leg would, if written out properly, be very interesting. So you see the light-keeper’s time does not hang heavily on his hands: far from it. The difference in importance between his daytime occupations and the duties of a bank president or a newspaper editor is purely arbitrary: a matter of mere

convention. At night, it is needless to say, he holds the destinies of so many husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons in his hands, and his responsibility is so great and so well borne, that he has passed into literature as an example of fidelity to duty.

The sanitary advantages of living by the seashore in the summer are now so well understood, especially by parents who wish their children to grow up well and strong, that it is only a question of time for the New England water-front to be lined in its entire length with houses, cottages, and hotels. Newport is, and probably will be always, our most elegant coast resort. Uncommonly well favored by nature, man has seconded instead of masking the original beauties of a picturesque locality rich in historic associations. Cooper's "Red Rover" and Higginson's "Malbone" and "Oldport Days" contain many pages of great interest respecting this summer metropolis of wealth and fashion. Henry James's "International Episode" also gives an amusing glimpse of life and society there as seen through an Eng-



lish eye-glass. Martha's Vineyard offers a curious contrast to such a place as Newport; and Nahant, which Tom Appleton called cold roast Boston, has a character all its own. The most beautiful harbors of our coast are those of Newport, Gloucester, New London, Eastport, Boston, and Portland. Hunt's painting of Gloucester



harbor has been made widely known by Stephen Parrish's etching after it. It was not more than a sketch, done at one sitting, but the effect was happy. Speaking of Gloucester, every one who likes a well-told, pathetic story should read Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's "Madonna of the Tubs." It makes fish — and codfish at that — seem

rather too dear, to think of the number of widows and orphans left in Gloucester every year by the cruelty of the sea. Just around the tip of Cape Ann lies that great stretch of dazzling white sand called Ipswich Beach, making away to the north. The picture of it, by W. L. Picknell, belonging to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, is naked truth itself, — the very breath of nature. If this were a book of places, as perhaps it ought to be, I would like nothing better than to describe the Isles of Shoals, Nantucket, Provincetown, Greenwich, Narragansett Pier, Watch Hill, Bath, New Bedford, Rye, York, Scituate, Campobello, Grand Menan, Stonington, Bristol, Hampton, Plymouth, Marblehead, Salem, Portsmouth, Manchester-by-the-Sea, Beverly, Swampscott, Lynn, Cohasset, and the many other charming spots — islands, ports, and summer resorts, some of them less known but not a whit less attractive and interesting — that embroider the eastern and southern frontiers of blessed New England.



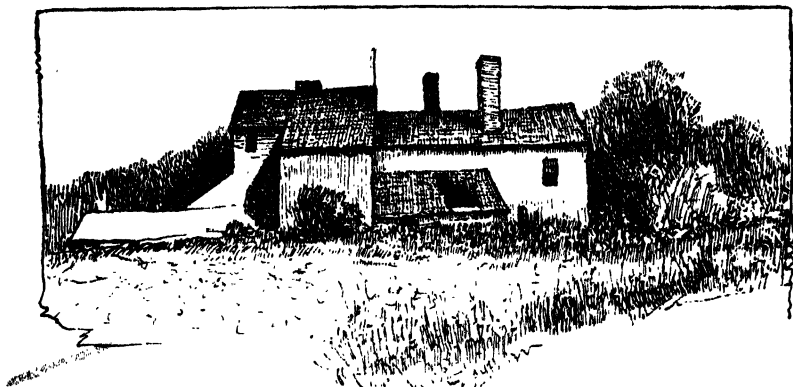


THE ABANDONED FARMHOUSE.

THERE are many abandoned farmhouses in New England, but the particular one to which I wish to refer is situated on a hill-top, not more than three miles from a city, yet in one of the loneliest localities that can be imagined. No other house stands near, and the place is well wooded. The house commands a fine prospect in two directions. Towards the east, looking over the belt of thick woods which girdles the hill, lies the town, so embowered in trees that its church spires only and its tallest mill chimneys rise into view. Beyond it is the

red face of a steep hill, and, at the right, the masts of vessels in the unseen harbor; towards the west, orchards, pasture lands, and fields of grain, a fat and sleek agricultural basin, evidently the property of the farmer whose multitudinous barns and granaries cover the crest of the neighboring hill more than half a mile distant, the house being so small in comparison with the barns that it would scarcely be noticed at the first glance. The views are pleasant and wide; that towards the town, panoramic, reminding one of an old-fashioned landscape by Thomas Cole or Asher B. Durand; that towards the country, sunny, cheerful, agrestic. This hill-top must have been a beautiful home when it was inhabited. Why was the old house deserted? I do not know whether the old people died without issue, or whether the children "went to New York" to starve in an attic; and I have never asked the neighbors. It is quite as well to leave these matters to speculation. No doubt the inmates were worthy commonplace folk whose histories would add no glimmer of romance to the spot, already sufficiently melancholy in its

solitude and decay. No sound comes up to the hill-top to-day save the busy, hot rattle of a distant mowing-machine, and the occasional roar of a locomotive from afar. Neither mowing-machine nor locomotive existed when this house



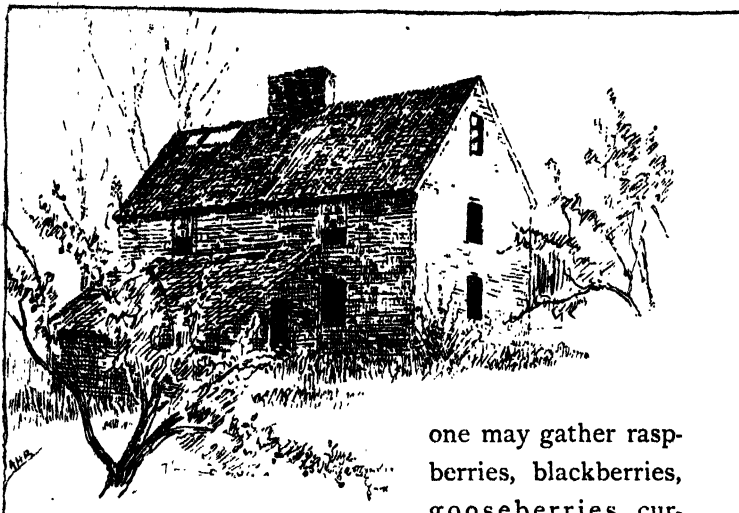
was built. There was such a thing as silence in those days.

The house has, or rather had, two stories and a small wing, which was probably added some time after the building of the main part of the edifice. In the centre of the structure there was a huge chimney, having open fire-places on three

sides. The rooms were low, but large, well lighted, and pleasant. The cellar extended under all parts of the building, and now serves as its sepulchre; for day by day morsels of plaster, of wood, of brick, and of stone drop one by one through the gaping floors and form a mass of débris where once the cider and the apples were hoarded. The doorstep was a great, flat, unhewn stone, slightly worn in the middle, where many feet have trod. The window sashes and the doors have all gone, and boards have been nailed up in places to keep the rain and wind from the tramps who have slept on the floor of the best room. At the rear, the whole wall is in a state of complete ruin, and a coach and four might be driven right into the kitchen, through the hideous breach which grows wider with each tempest. The capacious ovens and the spit where the housewife was wont to cook in the generous style of yore are the sole relics of the departed occupants. The greater part of the floor has caved in; that which is left is undulating, and shakes unpleasantly when walked upon. The falling plaster has left the laths bare here and

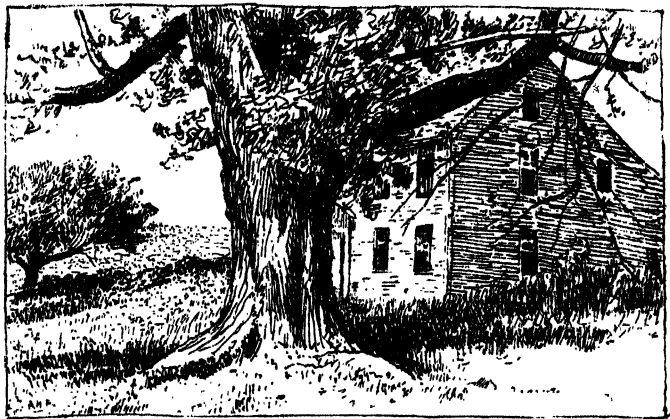
there, like the flesh leaving the bones that have upheld it. Steadily the work of decay and dissolution goes on; the rain and the heat rot; the frost cracks, and the wind racks and tears; the days of the poor old house are numbered. In the full sunlight of a perfect summer day it has a sad dignity, and, among its lovely surroundings, a beauty of its own, which belongs to all things old, decrepit, forlorn, and soon to be gone. But in a September gale, as I have seen it, when the breath of the storm was boisterous, and the voice of the southeast wind filled the woods with strange cries, under sombre skies which sent down torrents of rain, the venerable dwelling was a grewsome place. Under such circumstances it would not need a very active fancy to conjure up all sorts of spectres in its deserted chambers, particularly at those times when a loosened board, swayed by a gust of more than ordinary force, beat a ghostly reveille against the rafters.

All around the house are rank growths of bushes, weeds, and wild flowers. Near the front door is a rose vine, and in their seasons



one may gather raspberries, blackberries, gooseberries, currants, close by the little wing. The yard is full of milkweed, and at intervals stand apple-trees of considerable age, some of which bear good fruit. The old well is dismantled, and planks cover it up. Not far from the rear of the house there is a magnificent oak; and farther still a dense wood of chestnuts, hickories, and larches, without undergrowth, worthy to be the pleasure park of a royal residence. I have never seen any living things except cows

and birds enjoying the usufruct of this untenanted domain, where one is tempted to "lose



and neglect the creeping hours of time." Some day a wealthy man of taste will take this estate, and, in the place of the ruined farmhouse, will build a new home for himself and his children, will lay out walks and drives, fence in his grounds, and make a little Fontainebleau or Saint Cloud of this solitude. Lawn-mowers, instead of vagrant cattle, will crop the turf; brilliant exotics will bloom under glass where

now the lurid hollyhock, the decorous hydrangea, the "dear common flower" that gilds the fields and byways with such an honest yellow, and the still more common field daisy, grow in untutored luxuriance; shining equipages will roll up to the doors over well-kept roads where to-day a rickety farmer's wagon creeps by with the rattle and squeak of vehicular senility. Carriages, by the way, have done much to destroy the romanticism which flourished when men travelled on horseback; and I doubt whether a solitary bicycler, even at twilight, would have the same interest for novel-readers as the cloaked cavalier ascending the hill in the rain. What a scene for a story of adventure and intrigue! Would that Hawthorne might have known the place: he would have made it immortal. This fit theatre for a drama of human passions reminds me, though different, of a little picture by Ruysdael, with figures by Wouvermans, in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The subject is a ruined farmhouse, where a party of travellers have halted to rest and breathe their horses. The painting is rather dark, and the figures are

very small, but it is astonishing how complete is the unity of the persons and animals with the landscape: all being enveloped in the same air and illuminated by the same light. An inexplicable impression emanates from the canvas,



of vague romance: it is as intangible as the odor of faded violets, but inspires a personal interest in the fortunes of the horseman, and hangs the work forever on the line in memory's picture-gallery.



IN FIELD AND MEADOW.

HAYMAKING, apart from its utilitarian aspects, which need not concern us, is from beginning to end one of the most picturesque of the farmer's multifarious occupations. At first there is the great field full of tall, ripe grass, itself a handsome sight as it waves in the breeze and shines in the sun. The hot and cloudless morning comes when the metallic drone of the mowing-machine announces the downfall of the savory crop. No sound is more



intimately associated with the warm season in the country than this drowsy music of the knives, as there is no odor more thoroughly rustic than that of the new-mown hay. Now the sweating steeds toil steadily from corner to corner of the diminishing square of living verdure, and the long ranks of timothy and herdsgrass fall like brave battalions before the deadly charge of a superior foe. Next appears that prosaic successor to Whittier's "Maud Muller" — the horse-rake, which so easily performs its function that "The Rake's Progress" seems a veritable play. Then the laborers with hand-rakes swiftly heap the sun-cured haycocks at regular intervals to await the wain. It is common now for the signs of a shower to be shown in the north, "to spur their expedition," and all hands must work in lively fashion to get the last load home before the rain falls. As Troyon knew full well, a huge load of hay drawn by an ox team is an object to make a noble picture of. There was a delightful painting of a hay-making scene by Julien Dupré in the Paris Salon of 1881. Blue-black clouds gave a broad

hint of coming wet, and a group of men in blouses, and women in blue cotton gowns, with gaudy colored head-dresses, hastily raked the hay and pitched it upon the already enormous cartload which formed an effective mass of golden brown against the lowering sky. It is not often that women participate in the hay-making in New England, and the men would sooner suffer almost any indignity than wear the uniform of a peasantry, no matter how comfortable or becoming it might be.

Into the generous portals of the big barn the fragrant load is hauled in time, and then, hardest and hottest task of all, the rustling hay is stowed in the mows in immense forkfuls, and "mowed" (*i.e.* distributed evenly) in all the shadowy, dusty, stifling, cobwebbed recesses of its winter quarters. This done, the heated laborers may cease, the day's work being ended, with the exception of the "chores." In the half-night of the cattle-sheds, the cows, just driven home from the pasture by a barefooted boy, stand blandly chewing their cud and switching off the flies with their never-quiet



tails, as they wait to be milked. The oxen now are turned into the barn-yard to be fed and watered; they are superb there in repose, as the light falls on their lustrous flanks, and Troyon himself might feel his incompetency to cope with such royal hues and majestic masses. The horses must be fed, watered, bedded: there they stand in the twilight of the stable, as Géricault represented a row of them—the bay, the black, the roan—rear view, every line speaking of life. The pigs' inappeasable appetites are to be mitigated by some gallons of swill; the hens are to have their hour to cluck, to scramble, to peck, to fight, to greedily grab their fill of corn; and so the cheerful routine of the farm goes on.

What a charming landscape is framed soberly by the great open doorways of the red barn! Across the dusty highway, bordered by wide strips of glossy turf rich in clover, the apple orchard arrays its aisles and bowers of green shadow, and its grotesque arabesques of gnarled limbs, down the long gradual slope to where the big meadow lies. The meadow! there is

something sunny, large, and calm about the very word. Every farmer has a favorite meadow in some corner of his domain, known as "The Meadow," or qualified according to circumstances as the Big, the Long, the Hillside, the Swamp, etc. From year to year there is very little change in the appearance of the meadow. The



boy who drives home the cattle becomes a man, and, led by the *auri sacra famcs*, goes away; but, whether it be in Chicago, Valparaiso, Rome, Calcutta, Cape Town, or Melbourne, that he elects to pass his last days on earth, let me ask if you think that he ever forgets the meadow; the spring in the corner where the willows grow, where the moist earth is marked by the

hoofprints of the cows, where the low stone-wall makes such a pleasant seat in the shade, where the call of the quail, — “Bob White! More



wet!” — the note of the blackbird, the song of the thrush, and the zigzag flight of a thousand butterflies are but memories of long ago, that revive with a strange persistency and sweet-

ness in the wanderer's tough old heart? The rough rocky slopes, the sandy soil, the rugged faces of the hills, yield but a lean supply in comparison with the inexhaustible crops of the rich Western lands; but how infinitely superior are our horizons, albeit they profit only our eyes. However much of a clod a man may be, he perceives such things as these, often without knowing it: they are felt in the blood. Constant usage may dull, but not extinguish, the faculty of observation; and it is not true of our country population, whatever may be said of the European, that it has no soul for anything higher than the petty material interests of a narrow life of toil. A man may indeed live among fine pictures all his life, like the policeman in the National Gallery, and yet be not an authority upon the fine arts; but Nature's language is more universal, and her eloquence is more readily understood of all men, so that the poorest rustic is not so poor but he receives impressions which, had he the means of translating them, would go to swell the world's fund of poetry. Millet made his peasants pathetic fig-

ures ; but we have no peasant class ; and surely his lot is not so pitiable who lives outdoors, is never idle, has no fear of want, and can possess those homely joys which are, after all, the best, the most lasting, and the most wholesome. In our complicated cockney civilization, the most dignified personality is his who stands apart, with a background of landscape. He is not bending over a ticker to read the latest stock quotations ; nor pursuing the gold-bug, Tantalus-like, from railroad to railroad and from steamer to steamer ; neither is he feeding a printing-press with horrors and nastiness ; he is not in war nor politics ; and, for all that he is *not*, he is entitled to our most sincere admiration. Millet saw that the peasant was most like the ancient men, because his life was simple and his character had repose ; this is why the rough, stolid rustic, in his setting of fields and meadows, has something in him that reminds us of the strength, the soundness, the freedom, and the unconscious dignity of classic models in old art. Next to the manly calling of the sailor stands that of the farmer ; in both, man and nature are

forever *tête-à-tête*. Contact with the elements is what humanity needs, and not to be hived in mills, stores, and offices. More outdoor life, and fewer physicians! More sun and wind, and less physic!



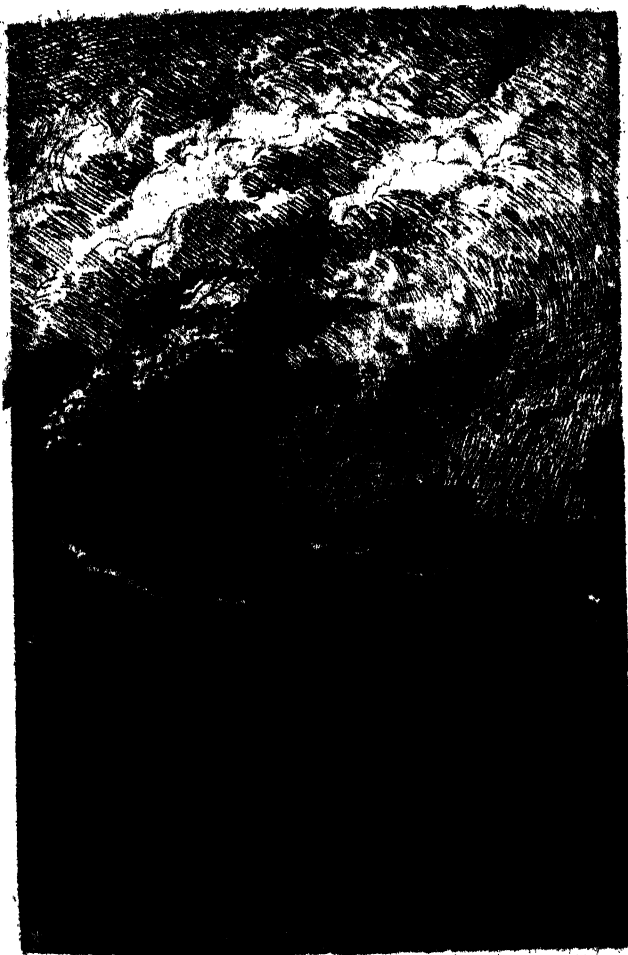
“Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to live i’ the sun,
Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither, come hither, come hither,
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.”

The most delightful description of country life that I know of is that in Blackmore’s

"Lorna Doone," the hero of which is a superb specimen of the old-fashioned race of farmers. There are some fine pictures of agricultural life also in Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd"; and I would be at a loss to say where more poetical prose could be found than in some of André Theuriet's stories of rural France. Once in a while George Sand gives you a splendid word-picture of some favorite scenery. William Black in his earliest works was fond of painting landscapes with his pen, but he rather overloads his colors, and approaches perilously near the chromo. Old Dumas could be great in almost any province, and occasionally he dashes off a landscape sketch of wonderful reality, as witness the account of a storm among the mountains in the opening pages of "Le Trou de l'Enfer," though perhaps you will say that sort of scene-painting is of the theatre, and is intended only as a background for the figures that strut upon the stage. Well, who has not seen remarkably fine landscapes, pastoral as well as romantic, in the scenery of the playhouse? And what is landscape in its

widest sense but a vast background for humanity?—a background of infinite variety, grandeur, and beauty, worthy of its purpose, but forever secondary, for the reason that nothing can be so interesting to men as Man.







THE THUNDER STORM.

BROTHER to the western cyclone, the thunder storm, usually more sedate in its demeanor, is not always less harmful. The almanac makes but small account of what it calls local storms, yet these events are frightful enough in New England during the dog-days to scare thousands of people each season, killing a few, maiming others, and doing a sum

of damage to real property which, if calculated in round figures, would make an appalling total. My meteorological *vade mecum* informs me that thunder storms are "apt to occur" wherever warm, moist, ascending currents meet with cold, descending currents; twelve or thirteen hours in advance they are announced by a stratus of cumulus having innumerable tufts or turrets on the top; they are "most likely to occur" between the hours of three and four o'clock in the afternoon; and it is the theory of the weather-wise that when the cumuli appear during the heat of the day, and pass away in the evening, continued fair weather may be expected; but when they increase rapidly, sink into the lower part of the atmosphere, and remain as the evening approaches, rain is at hand. These are a small part of the great system of signs which enables close observers to make good guesses as to the weather. It is certain that, though the cumuli, commonly known as cotton-bales or thunder-heads, seldom fail to put in their appearance in the lower part of the sky during the hot days of July and

August, they are not the infallible forerunners of rain by any means. These are the handsomest of clouds, and assume the greatest variety of forms and colors, especially towards night. Nothing more celestially innocent, peaceful, beatific, in the skies, than yon bank of splendid gray vapor, sailing slowly above the horizon, assuming from moment to moment a hundred indescribable shapes, alive with subtle lights; a vision of purity and grace and leisure. Domes and towers, summits of snow shining aloft like Pyrenean peaks, range upon range of intangible Alps, glorious in their inaccessible altitude, they move in state like airy gods, glow with golden and rosy fires, and cause the heart of man to leap up when he beholds them. Who would suppose that havoc lurked in the bosom of so much loveliness?

It is a sultry afternoon. The air is lifeless, stifling, torrid. The wind has died out, and a complete calm broods over the simmering fields and the glassy water. The flies bite with uncommon malignancy. The trees and flowers droop, as if waiting for something. As the

afternoon draws on, there is a prolonged distant rumbling, now broken by a louder accent, now dying away in a subdued growl. Sometimes the far sound of the thunder will be almost incessant for one or two hours before the storm



comes near enough to make its lightnings visible. Then in the northwest rises a portentous blue-black bank of clouds, spreading rapidly and steadily over the tenderer blue of the open sky, sending its skirmish-line forward in brisk puffs of wind to relieve the heavy and oppressive calm that hangs over the earth in front of the

tempest. The foremost edge of the revolving cloud-bank is a long, crescent line, broken into shorter scallops, embroidered with a woolly gray vapor, curling and wreathing like smoke in minor circles as it comes. Beneath this busy advance-guard extends the dense, flat face of dark-blue rain-cloud, now at intervals seared by the zigzag signature of the lightning bolt ; and finally beneath the storm's farthest skirt, a brazen gleam from the sun-touched west. The measure of the dance grows more tempestuous. Now the smoky tufts of the storm's high cornice are whirling overhead. The first large drops of rain patter noisily on the roof. The first full-fledged blast of the furious squall lays low the trembling treetops, rends here a sapling and there a feeble branch, and sends a panic-stricken host of loose leaves trooping through the air.

Now shorten all sail, skipper, and stand by to luff ! Shut windows, housewife, and make all snug alow and aloft ! Bend patiently your head, belated traveller, and draw your cloak closer ! To your coops, pretty chicks ! For here it comes.



With a stentorian, exultant roar the parent blast is upon us, and all the air is vocal with the shrill holiday chorus of his fiend-family, madly rollicking in the trees, savagely whipping the vines and shrubs, yelling down the chimneys, and piping a diabolic dance tune all

about the house. Down falls the solid, slanting flood of rain, with its splendid diapason of battle, no dainty drizzle, but a drenching, drowning downpour, a soaking, cats-and-dogs torrent, finding instantly all leaks, washing out highways, swelling springs to brooks, brooks to creeks, and creeks to rivers, flattening the fair growing grain, undermining culverts, bursting dams, submerging cities, and making merry over

its carnival of moist mischief with a wild wet joy. Above even its mighty uproar laughs the deep-chested wind; the thunder god claps his colossal hands in Olympian glee; and myriad echoes among the clouds send back the applause of the elements in long-drawn reverberations, as it were the rolling of titanic drums calling the powers of the upper air to mortal combat. The lightning seems to draw nearer. 'Tis a fearful guest, that comes unbidden and strikes home with merciful speed, — Death's fleetest agent. Bolts fall in forked lines of blinding brilliancy, shooting shafts of infernal fabrication at that scarred old target, the earth, rending the atmosphere into fiery shreds and sections, running a race with old Time and beating him, eating up the darkness, and etching crazy sketches on the shield of the night-black heavens.

What a little creature a man is now! how helpless, how overawed! The figure in this landscape is a petty thing, and wishes it were smaller yet.

By almost imperceptible degrees the crisis of

the storm passes and its rage abates. The downpour dwindles to a fine, thin rain. The winds wail more weakly. The thunder struggles and howls in its reluctant retreat. Belated



lightnings dart fiercely through the sweetened air. In a moment the sun will burst forth in a rift of the clouds, and set the million drops of water on leaves and grass to shining, not like diamonds, as some poets would have it, but much more heartily than any such heartless stones. Foul puddles clear up their mirror-faces to reflect the blue sky that will soon be uncurtained. Step outdoors and inhale the

freshness of the well-washed world. The birds are fairly outdoing themselves in the exuberance of their carols. From the trees and bushes and from the eaves of the house there is a smart and rhythmical dripping. The rain has passed ; all is clean and cool ; Nature emerges from her bath, sparkling, refreshed, rejuvenated.

Over in the south the storm can be seen pursuing its progress out to sea. It is grand to watch the sight-outrunning lightning in its gambols over the water, now that it has retired to a safe distance. The sun sets, night falls, and in the darkness of the evening the spectacle becomes more vivid and marvellous. A vast rack of cumulus clouds, upheaved in bulging masses, with towering alabaster domes, overhangs the horizon, and stands out momentarily in perfect distinctness as "Jove's lightnings, the precursors o' the dreadful thunder-claps," illuminate it with a pink light. The play of the flashes is almost incessant, for several storms are raging out there at once. The rosy lines leap from dome to dome, or, more often, dive from some lofty cloud-summit

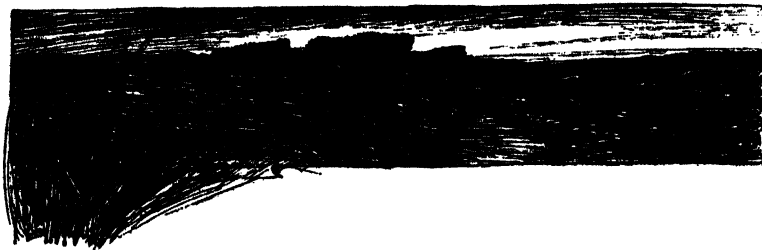
into the very depths of the black ocean. Those flames that are borne down beyond the nearest clouds, and shine from their vaporous valley upon the second range, make its flanks appear like some immense canopy, through which they send the intense reflection of their unseen fires. Too far removed from the storm centre to hear the thunder, the spectator may sit and watch such a Witch's Sabbath half through the night, with the stars winking overhead.

In the famous Morgan collection there was a splendid picture of the coming-on of a thunder storm. It was by Diaz. A man wearing a cloak was crossing a wide plain, where the rising wind already swept with great violence, bending and twisting trees and bushes in its path, and making the traveller's farther progress a matter of no slight difficulty. Over a large part of the sky was spread a cloud-bank of inky bluish-black, with an undertone of coppery green, suggestive of tornadoes and windy ruin. The clouds had not the funnel-form, however, which is supposed to characterize the cyclone, and doubtless what Diaz had witnessed was nothing



more than an effete European squall travelling at the moderate rate of fifteen and one-half miles an hour, instead of an American storm which has an average speed of twenty-six and one-tenth miles an hour. Isabey has described a stormy day with much skill, too, in his "Embarkation," a work full of nerve, conveying an admirable impression of "dirty" weather. Hunt undertook to paint a thunder storm once, but with indifferent success; it was not one of his good days. I suppose that nobody has ever illustrated showery weather so faithfully as Constable — weather which means "take your umbrella with you when you go out to-day," — or in other words, the sort of weather alluded to in the classic legend:—

"Open and shet,
The day'll be wet."



SUNSET EFFECTS.

WHEN the Almighty hung the sun in the heavens, and gave men eyes wherewith to see its light, he offered one capital proof of his kindness toward his children; yet how few of them ever lift their eyes from their hideous ledgers long enough to observe the beauty of the sky, land, and sea, all animated by the ever-shifting sunlight, which paints silver and golden pictures everywhere from hour to hour, and, in departing from the world at night, sends up a chromatic hymn of praise which makes glorious the firmament from west to east. A world



without light and color is not to be conceived. The moon is a paradox, not fit for man to live on. How can night be without day?

There is a sweet melancholy in the sunset hour, like that of the fall of the year, or of the parting of friends who hope to meet again. The day is ended, with its tasks, and one more *étape* in the long march is done: a few hours' rest, and then on again! The time invites meditation. Since man does not live by bread alone, the eyes should be fed as well as the stomach, and in the optical diet of each day's round, so full of variety, the setting of the sun may be regarded as the dessert, or the after-dinner coffee, which is to leave its taste longest on the palate of the sight.

Though no two sunsets are exactly alike, there is not one of them but has some handsome features in it; as a general rule those that are most admired because of their extreme brilliancy of coloring are even less beautiful than the quieter sort which often pass unnoticed. One reason is that a vast number of people dwell in towns, in valleys, or among trees, where

they can see only a small part of the sky, and naturally they do not take much interest in what is going on up there unless it is something altogether extraordinary. They will admire, most probably, a sunset of the sanguinary sort, where the clouds are dyed a blood red, as depicted in the well-known paintings of Mr. Vermilion which are all so much alike ; not that his pictures are untruthful, either, as pictures go : he saw that effect once, and has been painting it ever since, unmindful of the fact that Nature's programme is eternally diversified. A flaming debauch of warm color, such as Delacroix or Turner would have hardly dared to reproduce in all its riotous intensity, this just suited Vermilion, who, without a thought of difficulty, translated it into a thoroughly bourgeois and hopelessly prosaic picture, after a snug little recipe of his own, the gods not having made him poetical. There is less art enters into the making of such paintings than Aunt Matilda uses in the compounding of her mincepies, for she varies the flavor by adding more or less of this or that ingredient in each batch,

and follows no invariable rule, relying upon instinct, and taking an artist's pleasure in the soundness of the work ; whereas Mr. Vermilion, and those other mechanical painters, Messrs. Ultramarine and Chrome Yellow, have forgot the youthful inspiration which gave them their first start in the profession, and blindly adhere to established formulæ for the manufacture of ruddy sunsets, cerulean Venices, and summer twilights. The worthy citizen who buys these ready-made mediocrities is rather pleased than otherwise to know that his acquisitions are so similar to all the rest of the trio's productions that visitors never fail to recognize the paternity of his treasures, and it is a comfort in these days to feel that one owns something genuine if not unique. Nor have we any right to complain, for Vermilion, Ultramarine, and Chrome Yellow are good fellows : and it is not wholly their fault that there are so many artists in the world still awaiting recognition in the obscurity of their sixth-floor-back studios. And then — to return to our sunsets — perhaps a part of my prejudice against effects of Mr. Vermilion's

kind is literary; certainly it is hard to find a novel, a poem, or a book of travel without its description of at least one remarkable red sunset. However, there is no cheapness, thank Heaven! about the real article, be it in any combination of the primary colors. Words and pictures may grow hackneyed, tiresome, and stale, but the things they stand for lose nothing by age and repetition. In Nature, says Emerson, all is useful, all is beautiful. There is no crudity in the most brilliant of real effects, no fever in the warmest coloring, no excess of frigidity in the coolest. The atmosphere is a magical tonist, and never falsifies a value. Harmony is everywhere except on your mediocre painter's palette; yet, strangely enough, it is he who is forever prating about realism, as if photography were the highest form of pictorial art, and the world were dead and colorless. Away with a realism which has nothing real about it except its pretensions; let it go the same way as the impressionism devoid of impressions. The truths that were good enough for Raphael and Correggio, for Rembrandt and



Velasquez, are good enough for us ; and we are free to seek them where they sought and found them, in the heart of Nature, without intermediaries. The schools have never yet made a great painter, and never will.

The handsomest part of a handsome sunset is



often in the region of the sky farthest removed from the light, that is to say, the east ; although it is true that the whole expanse of the sky is likely to assist in the radiant pageant, each section having its own peculiar beauties, from a flaming fiery centre outward through countless gradations to the last faint reflection of warm

color lingering on the crest of some mysterious low-lying cloud. My western horizon is admirable, and no landscapist could see it at sundown without wishing to paint it. At the left is a village with here and there a red roof; then a group of healthy cherry trees about one-eighth of a mile distant; full a mile beyond is the well-defined ridge of a very respectable hill, crowned by a fine thick wood; now fancy nearer trees intervening, and then a reach of still more distant hill, almost bare of trees. Two large apple-trees not far away lift a mass of dark foliage to the sky. To the extreme right the crest of a gentle slope makes away in the middle distance to the northward. These lines are suave and smiling, but not insipid. There is something very distinctive and piquant about the shape of the bluish-green wood in the first distance; it is "backed like a weasel"; and that is where the sun goes down. When it goes down in a gilt-edged edition, leaving the sky clothed in an effulgent livery of amber and brass, that mass of trees is full as sombre, impenetrable, and dusky as any ever painted by Daubigny. When

it goes down from out a clear field of pale greenish blue, and leaves a film of dusty purple over it, with slate-colored cirri trailing above, only their lower edges tinted by faintest pink, and when the clear sky underneath changes to



luminous pale gold lightly washed with a coppery bronze, as the clouds darken and spread, till up towards the zenith their drab patches relieve depths of fast-fading rose, then, shades of great Rousseau, you are here ! There are times when

the humor of the sunset is all soft and mellow and full of sober amiability, when the sky seems to melt away in a golden mist, and the level rays of light touching the western slope of a field are like a benediction on the happy earth; the commonest things bathed in this sweet flood are transformed to objects of beauty. It was so that Claude Lorrain would see his world. Then comes a day of storm, and the heavy rain clouds darken all the landscape, till at evening the west suddenly runs up its signal of clearing weather, and in a twinkling the sad gray curtains are whisked from before the gates of the occident in time to reveal an orange and green chamber of more than royal magnificence in which the sun has gone to bed. The other night, a huge array of slate-gray clouds had been piled up over there by some aërial architect, with horizontal strata projected on purpose to catch reflections of fiery scarlet in long bars of unutterable brilliancy. It was, perhaps, a bed of celestial cinders, glowing with their last life, the débris of the day's full fire. Many a sunset has flamed and faded over my horizon that words are but

poor means of sketching ; some were portents, and some were prodigies, and others still were as a mother's good-night kiss. They are, all in all, as near indescribable as anything on earth may be. We have our little stock of phrases, our metaphors, and what then ? Are all the gems known to the jeweller equal to the colors



in the sky which we hope to praise by comparing with them ? It is a sheer waste of powder to fire volleys of adjectives which, from the con-

stant abuse of them, have come to mean anything or nothing. Is it not rather sacrilegious to speak of the finest sights in life in terms which the school-girl applies to her caramels?

Art has a curious progressive effect on the serious mind: at the outset it seems to respect nothing, and it ends by becoming a religion. So a work of art is something done in love and faith: and because these exalted feelings cannot be well counterfeited, their absence being easily detected, the world refuses to be moved by a picture which has cost its maker no real emotion. To look upon an actual scene and say, That is like a painting by my friend, this is indeed a genuine tribute to genius; for the art of which Nature strongly reminds us must be well born and nobly inspired.



IN THE WOODS.

FEW men really love solitude, and this is one of the reasons that it is pleasant to be in the woods, where, although alone, one is never solitary. They are sham hermits who take up their abode in cabins in the forest; for in such a home there must be plenty of company. It is a brave kingdom, where the inhabitants have their music for nothing, "sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not." The free spirit of the woods seems somehow to penetrate the least poetical natures. Men go down in Maine

to hunt and fish, and mayhap bring down better game than they seek. The tuneful voice of Nature is continually audible in the shadowy solitudes. The lonely glen, and wild rocky dell, the high canopy of moving boughs, the solemn fastnesses where the light of day is tempered to a perpetual dusk, school the eyes to quiet contemplation, and solace the restless mind with balmy day-dreams. Sky and distance are banished from the scene, and all is either foreground or mystery.

Mystery! that is the name for this leafy city, whose tangled avenues begin nowhere and lead to the unknown. The fancy roves in a labyrinth of bosky byways, now charmed, now awed. There is no Oriental rug to equal the pine needles, dead twigs, and fallen leaves that strew the fragrant, endless alleys of the forest; it is a carpet elastic under the tread, grateful to the nostrils, and of a tone and pattern that never weary the sight, — brown beneath, and diapered with the exquisitely delicate shapes of ferns and mosses in many shades of green, with weeds which deserve more honorable names.



The gray of granite boulders ~~makes~~ cool spots in this harmonious field, flecked by moving points of sunlight, and variegated by a thousand caprices of brier and vine, bush and sapling. No two square yards are like, but all are in perfect accord. The light is colored a golden green by the multitude of reflections from the foliage; it is the despair of literal painters, and no picture is adequate to suggest its peculiar quality except in a remote manner when the mid-summer sun hangs high and vegetation is at its fullest life.

Our trees are being felled at such a rate that the grand old woods that once covered a large part of the country are already, with a few exceptions, things of the past, and in time we may be obliged to go to Europe or to South America to see a forest worthy of the name. Such a wood as that of Fontainebleau, easily accessible from Paris, would undoubtedly "pay" in the neighborhood of large towns here, but though we have cut down scores of them, it is not so easy to make them. Shall Americans in the future have to go to the suburbs of Paris

and London when they wish to see a good bit of woods? Let Boston at least earn a new title to distinction (it is time) by guarding from real-estate vandalism the wild tract known as the Middlesex Fells, which, improving with age like wine, if preserved in all its integrity, will be the finest ornament of a district which does not lack natural charms, and which can be spoiled only by the vulgarity and greed of the citizens. Indeed, one must travel far now to find more picturesque horizons than those of historic Middlesex County, with her dense, luxuriant woods and her rolling purple hills. Woodman, spare that tree! As the amiable M. Oudinot has said, "*Celui qui aime vraiment la nature ne peut guère être qu'un honnête homme*"; and surely he who loves trees cannot be all wrong-hearted.

It is no easy matter nowadays in the greater part of this New England to get lost in the woods. At the moment the explorer is convinced that he has penetrated to the holy of holies, and contemplates taking formal possession of the heart of the place, a stronger light

breaks upon his way, and a few steps bring him to the farther edge of the wood, within view of a barn and a haystack. A few repetitions of this experience are enough to extinguish all sense of personal heroism in the adventurer. However, the Pemigewasset forest in New Hampshire may be considered a very respectable wilderness for these times; at all events when a party of us tramped through it there were no paths, tracks, nor "blazes," for some thirty miles, and to find the way it was customary to follow the sinuous courses of the streams. In this virgin forest, as we liked to call it, everything was entirely natural and inviolate; there were no traces of human beings except two deserted, ill-smelling wood-cutters' cabins at far intervals. The general aspect of these trackless wilds was not widely different from that of a snug little wood of ten acres, in the centre of which one may momentarily fancy the nearest house a thousand miles away; yet the sense of hearing testified otherwise. There were no sounds save those that might be heard here by the savage before Columbus broke the

egg,—the birds' careless improvisations, the jovial confidences of the brooks, the light foot-fall of some invisible animal, the soft rustling of the foliage far overhead, the fall of a dead limb; and, at dead of night, when we tired wayfarers lay outstretched on our pine-bough beds, the sudden and startling challenge of the owl. There seems to be no such thing as absolute silence in this world, but the sounds of the wilderness (like its sights and smells) are mostly sweet, and it is no slight pleasure to be for a while beyond hearing of the locomotive's harsh whoop, the din of mills and traffic, and all the nerve-racking noises of town and trade. Then how good is plainest fare eaten by the camp-fire, how sound and refreshing the sleep of the bivouac, and what a relish for life and work the keen morning air imparts! The cascades which abound in the Penikese forest are of surpassing beauty, and all along the East Branch there are charming bits of the wildest character, as the rapid stream winds its devious way among myriads of mossy, spray-sprinkled boulders and stones of every hue, hemmed in

by massive walls of undergrowth and towering trees. Emerging from the forest, the pedes-



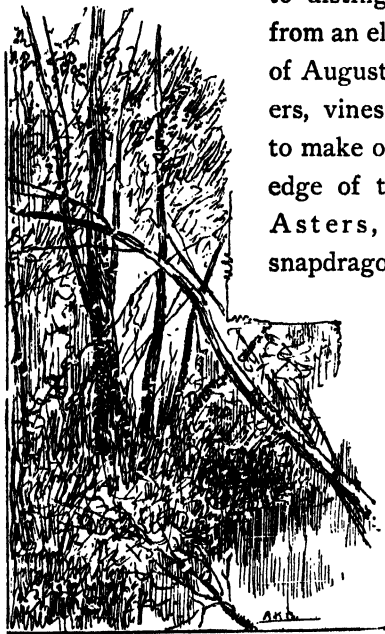
trian's arduous enterprise is crowned finally by a wonderful spectacular view of the White Mountain Notch from the steep slope of Mount Willey.

In every wood there are miniature woods, and so on, down to the smallest visible growth of starry moss. One need not be a naturalist

to distinguish a huckleberry bush from an elm ; but in the rich month of August the display of wild flowers, vines, and ferns is something to make one long for more knowledge of these gracious things. Asters, clematis, sumac, tansy, snapdragon, golden-rod, althea,

marshmallow, pride-of-the-meadow, and many like them, warm the pathway's side, and deck the swamp and woodland with more than the decorous beauty of cultivated flowers. The crushed leaves of sweet-fern,

trodden down by some passer, fill the air with the warm, languid odor of summer. Along the weedy lane the deep, honest, bricky red of the



sumac glows prodigally, and in the homely garden of the farmer's daughter the now famous sunflower lifts its lavish disk of gold, down there by the long grape-vine arbor of rustic cedar, a tunnel of generous verdure, paved with a mosaic of wavering light and shade, such a *foyer* as Paul Baudry could not match.

The most solemn wood is that of tall, straight pines, which stand in nearly regular ranks, forming stately aisles, and suggesting the spontaneous architecture of sylvan cathedral builders. In Courbet's great picture of "The Quarry" the verdant twilight of the pine forest is richly translated, and the magnificent coloring, equal to that of a Veronese, is worthy of the theme. Yet a Belgian critic wittily wanted to know in what Parisian studio Courbet had found such a neat grove. It is well enough for all of us to take some things for granted, among which (the Belgian safely might have assumed) the French iconoclast's knowledge of his native Vosges woods and hills was not open to question; and it must be mortifying for an authority who sets the petty masters of Antwerp

and Brussels above Courbet, to think that "the laugh is on himself," instead of on the outcast whose arrogance was so cruelly humbled in his last days.

To jump from the Vosges to Vermont, well-named state, I think that the complexion and character of our own green woods have never been more faithfully reported than in the paintings of Marcus Waterman, an artist of singular merit and originality, whose power of acute observation is extraordinarily developed, and whose execution is broad without wanting in particularity.

Among the most eloquent descriptions of woods in our language, certain lines in the "Alastor" of Shelley are pre-eminently inspired. There are no more apt touches in all the literature of the subject than such as occur in the passage beginning :-

" The noonday sun

Now shone upon the forest, one vast mass
Of mingling shade, whose brown magnificence
A narrow vale embosoms. . . . "

The observation of Nature disclosed by this extremely beautiful passage is as intimate and loving as ever a painter employed, and is enough

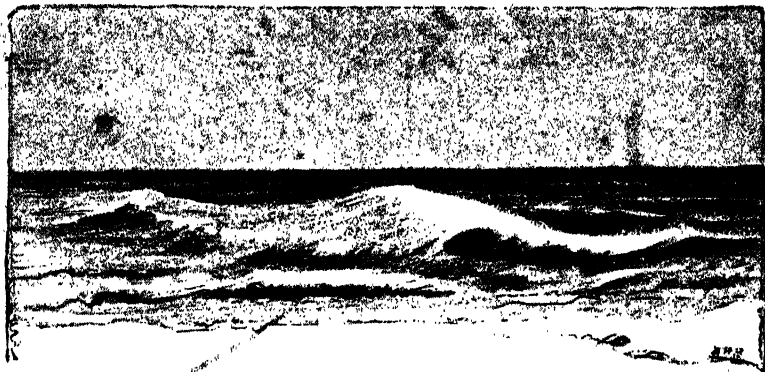


to show with what reason this poet shares with Wordsworth the regard of so many landscapists.

The little forest of Mormal, described so prettily by Robert Louis Stevenson in his "In-land Voyage," was perfumed with sweet-brier, and he thought it the most imposing piece in

Nature's repertory. The smell of trees he considers the sweetest and most fortifying of all smells. Like Heine, and like Merlin, he would be buried under the oaks. De Musset preferred to lie among the willow's roots; for its pallor was dear to him, and he fancied that its shade would rest lightly on the earth above him; this harmless ambition has been gratified.





MOODS OF THE SEA.

THE sea is spoken of as if it were a free agent, and blamed or praised accordingly. In fact it is the slave of the winds and the moon, and acts only in obedience to their power. It is sullen only when the clouds are heavy above it, and cheerfully reflects the gladness of blue skies. Its passion is borrowed from the madness of the airs that blow upon it, and it is in no degree responsible. For poetry's sake, however, and because of ancient associations stronger than we realize, the sea will not only

be personified by generations yet unborn, but Neptune will still be scolded for the mischief wrought by Boreas, Æolus, Luna, and all the crew of wind-gods that roam over the sounding main, as ready for wicked work now as they were in the days of Ulysses.



So the moods of the sea are largely due to external influences, as the moods of men are. It is simply a huge instrument of destiny; mighty with a higher might than its own; Omnipotence uses it to work out its inscrutable

designs on the individual and on nations; the vast theatre of countless tragedies, changeful yet ever essentially the same, it is the most beautiful and the most mysterious element in this world of beauty and of mystery. When a light breeze is blowing from the east in the early morning, and a white haze dulls the outlines of the shore, the whole surface of the sea is a tremulous array of dazzling flashes, quivering with points of molten silver; each ripple fires its little sunbeam of intolerable radiance at the sight; it is a shining world without shade. The local color of the water is pale blue, approaching a greenish hue, but the sun makes the whole expanse a crystal carnival of light. So joyous and peaceful is this holiday aspect of the sea, that, seeing it thus on the morning after a great storm, it is natural to accuse it of the basest hypocrisy; for has it not within the twenty-four hours swallowed up most cruelly many brave ships and men? and how can it put on at once this heavenly smile? is it not a monstrous lie to say all is well?

A northeaster in the autumn clothes every-

thing in dull grays. The water is of a dirty, dull light brown; on the crests of the waves where they break, the brown becomes a dirty, dull yellow, then dissolves in a dirty, dull white



foam. The sky is purple at the east, with vague forms of cold, smoky gray against it. The line of the horizon is lost in mist. Every hue and every form is inexpressibly dull. In such weather it is easy to understand why Henri Regnault swore an eternal *haine au gris*.



Such are our New England winter storms — gray, gray, gray. One almost forgets what the blessed sun looks like, so persistently do the leaden clouds hatefully hang over the frozen earth. *Haine au gris !*

In a warm southerly storm, when the taste of the wind is soft and briny, the sea is a dun color, or cream-brown ; the white horses race merrily as far out as the sight carries ; fitful gleams of sunshine illuminate long streaks of tossing greenish water, bounded by sober shadows where dense rain scuds over the deep. A sudden burst of light reveals a brig's upper spars above the corrugated horizon ; then all's closed in again, the mist enwraps the foam-bordered rocks, the rain beats spitefully and stings like sleet, the wind renews its uproar with augmented energy, the surf grinds and pulsates in hollow rhythm on the sands. On such a day as this, it is not hard to sympathize with Byron's virile apostrophe to the ocean. It is exhilarating to inhale deeply the breath of a summer tempest ; to be in it and of it ; to feel its wetness and rude violence ; to laugh at the

gale's fury. Rough and boisterous, not to be trifled with, the sea is a hearty, wholesome fellow, whose qualities grow on acquaintance, and, within the wide bounds of a servitude borne so easily that it takes on the appearance of freedom, it is a good friend to man.

Statistics might be made to prove how it clothes and feeds many men, and kills but a small proportion of the host that lives on it; what pestilences would sweep away multitudes if it were not for the sanitary services of the tides; how many lives are saved yearly by the purity and tonic properties of its air. Thus, though the individual victim cannot console himself by any such philosophy, the romantic story of averages pleads for the ocean. Sometimes, it must be confessed, the elements seem to be moved by a curious perversity that makes of them the most implacable foes to humanity. The solitary, hand-to-hand struggle of a man with the sea,—the one animated by love, the other by blind hate,—this was the splendid theme of Victor Hugo's "Toilers of the Sea," in which the man, after unheard-of efforts, pre-

veiled, only to be conquered at last by a maid's unkindness. And so he sought that deep harbor of storm-beaten souls which Ariel sings :—

“ Full fathom five thy father lies ;
Of his bones are coral made ;
Those are pearls that were his eyes :
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.”

The imagination of all poets has been affected by that great unexplored graveyard of nations, — the bottom of the ocean. We know that there are high mountains, and deep valleys, caves, rocks, meadows, and impenetrable forests, where wondrous marine monsters rove down there, — a whole unknown world, forever hid from mortal sight, of which the most fantastic dreams can hardly furnish a parallel. The future explorer who shall carry out the ingenious suggestion of Jules Verne will see through the windows of his submarine vessel such beauties and such horrors as fancy has never painted. It is no wonder that sailors are superstitious. Who does

not believe in mermaids? I do not mean the kind for many years exhibited in Boston and Amsterdam museums, but the genuine musical and green-haired sirens, the *femmes marines* of the old traditions. One of these was caught by a Dutch seaman, who married her: at least Dumas says so in "Les Mariages du Père Olifus," and a terrible dowry of trouble she brought to the old reprobate.

Few subjects present so many difficulties to the painter as the sea, because it will not keep still. This country has given birth to a considerable number of marine artists who have distinguished themselves in their arduous specialty. I need refer only to Winslow Homer; and he is to be set above many that are honorable in that he has the imagination to cope with immensity. By some artful touch he suggests the unspeakable extent of unseen ocean stretching leagues on leagues away beyond the horizon; with a few brush strokes he converts Winsor and Newton inanimate into the living buoyancy, the perpetual motion, and the baffling light-glances of the waves; and finally in dramatic contrast with all



this brute bulk and untamable power he places the physical insignificance of man, who, by his ingenuity and bravery, is enabled to profit by the forces of Nature. Ships and sailors, and all things that have to do with the blue water, he knows well, and paints with hearty sympathy in a manly style. There is a fearful loneliness and desolation in his picture of a Gloucester fisherman lost in his dory at nightfall on the Grand Banks. High and cold the black waves toss all about the little craft, and the last light is fading from the sky, even as hope fades from the poor fellow's heart. The worst of it is that it is so true. In just this awful way hundreds of Gloucester men go to their death every year; and still in spite of danger and foreign malice the hunt for codfish and dollars goes on, while the army of widows and orphans grows apace.

Those who remember the comical controversy which raged over the "Slave Ship" of Turner, when it was exhibited in Boston, will perhaps appreciate the following anecdote, as illustrating a vulgar form of lay criticism: A person standing in front of an excellent marine painting in

a picture-gallery turned to an acquaintance, and said, dogmatically, "Well, I have never seen sea water of that color, and I do not believe that any one ever has." The reply, which struck me as very sensible, was to this effect: "I have seen the water of so many colors under various conditions of light, that I should have no doubt of the truth of the picture, even if I had never noticed this particular effect. I see that Mr. — painted it, and as he has been studying the sea for the last forty years, I presume that he has seen a good many things that you and I have never observed." The rebuke was gently expressed, and well deserved. It is capable of wide application.

Speaking of Turner reminds me of the "Fighting Téméraire," and of how naval architecture has degenerated, since the day of that vessel, in a pictorial sense. The old wooden ships were royally handsome under sail, but this iron age in which we live is sadly non-picturesque, and what could be uglier than a *Monitor* unless it were a *Merrimac*? There is something about a square-rigged vessel that is

majestic ; even a little brig looks more imposing than a three-masted schooner of thrice her tonnage. Perhaps this is prejudice : there are glorious memories for us Americans connected with the old type of ships. New England has been a nursery for hardy mariners in the past, and it may be hoped that the race of the Yankee sailors has not wholly died out. The brave old salts who made our flag respected wherever it waved, the bold skippers of New Bedford, Nantucket, the Vineyard, Provincetown, and New London, who unfurled the stars and stripes amid the icy solitudes of the Antarctic Circle and the surges of the South Pacific, are gone ; but it is not certain that their grandsons will rest contented always to live ashore.

In Clark Russell's best stories there are some well-studied word-pictures of the broad ocean, though he piles on the adjectives almost too profusely when he comes to a storm, and one does lay down such books as "The Wreck of the Grosvenor" with the impression that the author has had more than his fair share of rough weather. There is no mistaking his

knowledge of his subject, nor his enthusiasm for it; but a sailor should have no aversion to a little dullness, and there is nothing more fascinating than certain pages in "Two Years before the Mast" and "The Red Rover," where a per-



fect trade-wind monotony reigns supreme, and the reader feels that he may drop asleep at any moment, hearing the swish of the water alongside and feeling the soft salt wind fanning his face. Happy are those sailors who have no history.



NOCTURNE.

NIGHT in the country, — starless, moonless, rayless, unmitigated night. Darkness which can be touched; smelt, breathed; a pelting rain-storm raging; a blind-man's buff bandage bound over the earth; blank, bottomless blackness everywhere.

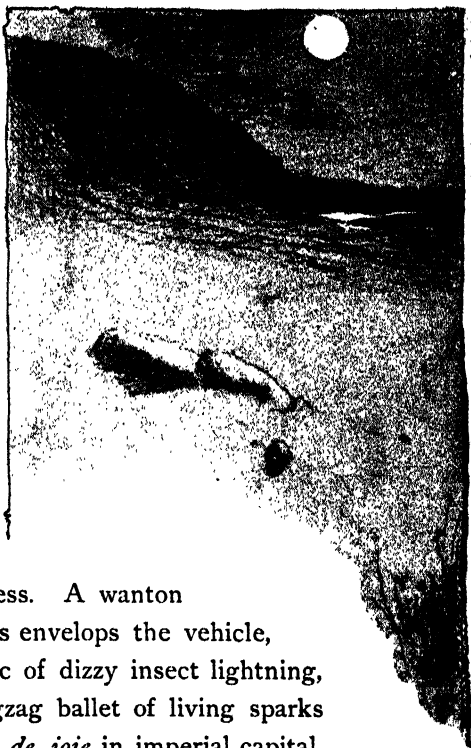
In the very dead of such a night as this, imagine the old-school country doctor of New England, summoned urgently to the bedside of a distant patient, setting forth in his chaise. Accustomed to perambulate the lonely roads at all hours, in all seasons, and in all sorts of weather, he is soon nodding drowsily over the loose reins, the intelligent horse being better able than his driver to find the way, and full as anxious to get to his destination. The veteran nag has something of the faculty of a nyctolopus; he holds a steady jog-trot through the end-

less shadows, splashing unconcernedly through the mud and the pools, head down, but with never a stumble. Over the hills where the night wind blows keen and damp; through the woods where the carriage-hood brushes showers of spray from overhanging boughs; thundering over shaky, unseen, wooden bridges beneath which black streams are rolling swiftly; past the village tavern from which the hoarse voices of belated revellers come vaguely in profane song; by the shore whose breakers mingle their voices in the storm's wild chorus; now with creaks and groans of ancient axles the patient steed's freight is hauled up a lengthy slope; a dim silhouette of barns and haystacks, woods and fields, appears against the murky sky; a tallow-dip gleams feebly through a farmhouse window; "Ah, doctor, how glad I am that you have come at last!"

The visit concluded, the physician starts for home. Midway a thick forest stands on one side of the road, and on the other side meadows slope easily down to the edge of a swamp. The rain has ceased, and at this point begins an

impromptu exhibition of fireworks, or fireflies' festival. Low and high, near and far, among the trees and down over the meadows, in the road and everywhere, it is nothing but a bewildering succession of quick flashes, made the brighter by the dense darkness. A wanton whirl of fiery caprices envelops the vehicle, weaves a weird fabric of dizzy insect lightning, dances a furious zigzag ballet of living sparks all around. No *feu de joie* in imperial capital, exalting the pomp of conquering monarch, could ever eclipse the extraordinary activity and brilliancy of this display.

The majesty of the night, says Balzac, is



truly contagious ; it awes and it inspires ; there is an indescribable potency in the thought, "everything slumbers, and I am awake." Suppose the good doctor's homeward road now brings him by the sea, as the clouds are breaking away. There is a sudden glow beyond the eastern horizon, warm and ruddy ; it grows deeper, and may be a ship on fire. Now, where is your almanac-wisdom, dull-eyed doctor ? Do you not recognize that familiar flushed pate emerging from the brine, that ghost of a leer in the fat countenance, where extinct volcanoes and dried-up ocean-beds write their seams of dissipation on the lunar cheek and brow ? The chin appears at length, drippingly, as it seems ; and the flush fades to a most delectable amber. In a moment the magic path of winking light grows across the water — that unstable road by which our reeling fancy alone can walk to a dead world. The moon rides higher, and pales as it climbs ; the amber tint gives way to silver ; it shines with a cool and chastened light. The solitary spectator watches it as it dodges in and out among the clouds, now sailing fast before

the west wind. It fringes the ragged rack with a clear pearly radiance, playing a stately game of phantom hide-and-seek with the scurrying vapors. What is it that Shelley makes the cloud say?

“That orbèd maiden with white fire laden
Whom mortals call the Moon
Glides glimmering o’er my fleece-like floor
By the midnight breezes strewn.”

The quality of moonlight defies all analysis; it is cool, but not hard; white, but not colorless; passionless, but a great breeder of poetry and sentiment. In a picture of a farmyard at night which Millet drew, and which is an epitome of silence made visible, the moonlight falls like a heavenly caress on the rustic scene, bathing it in a soft splendor of peace. A cat is seen crawling up a ladder which stands against the open door of the hayloft, and the sly, noiseless movement of this midnight prowler only emphasizes the slumberous quietude that broods over the farm. The mind’s ear harks, and hears mayhap a distant watch-dog baying the moon. The world’s asleep, past snoring.

Down on the dark shore, where now a soft breeze hints at the sweet languor of southern nights, the waves, as they break on the rocks,



throw up a spray of silvery light, dying away only to be incessantly renewed. The sea is alive with phosphorescence, and the shining jelly may be picked up in the hand where the surf rolls it up on the beach. Afloat, gently

rocked by the illuminated swell, one might feel as if suspended in space, for there are stars beneath as well as overhead. The oarsman dips his blades into molten silver, and lifts from the water at each recovery a dripping marvel of pale evanescent fire.



It is commonly said that an astronomer must be a deist or a madman, and no doubt he who spends his nights in the observation and study of other worlds should have a healthy and reverent imagination. How much there is to know, and how little the wisest know! In the presence of the stars science is very humble. Old as the universe seems, are we not at the very beginning of things? The vast unknown looms

in the night, above, beneath, beyond, within ; the Sphinx's ancient riddle is still unguessed ; but it is certain that all this phantasmal scene is no less beautiful than amazing. While manly Science halts, groping its way upon the threshold of things, the heedless child Art enters boldly in, with its happy intuitions enjoys the visible universe, and listens in raptures to the music of the spheres. Unconcerned as to the inhabitants of Jupiter, not even knowing its name nor its course in the heavens, it sees with unalloyed pleasure the regal planet's lustre ; for appearances, not facts, are the subject of its contemplation. The full absurdity of Vedder's picture, "The Fates gathering in the Stars," would not be likely to strike any one so forcibly as an astronomer, who is in the habit of regarding these little twinklers as worlds *de facto*. Let savans smile at the illogical fancies of painters and poets ; perhaps ~~these~~ latter have the best of it, after all. Who ~~has~~ drunk deep enough from the Pierian spring to be beyond the danger-line ? It is just as well to consider the stars simply as stars, or even, if you please, as jewels on Night's

Ethiopian forehead. Meanwhile, a smattering of astronomy is excellent, and goes a long way, on the veranda, of a balmy August evening. The outlines of the Virgin, the Serpent, the

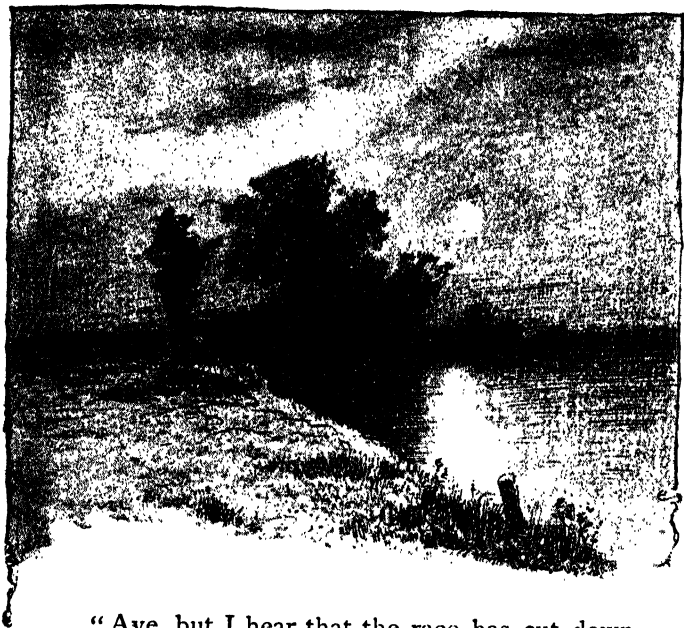


Archer, the Swan, the Eagle, the Harp, the Bear, and those other figures suggested to the ancients by the groupings of the stars, from which the several constellations take their names, are easily learned, though rather fantastical, and

there is no small accomplishment which yields better dividends of simple pleasure than the ability to recognize Venus and Jupiter, the red Arcturus, blue Altair, and that constant mid-summer friend Vega, which will, one night, a trifle of twelve thousand years hence, become the polar star. One comes to have preferences among the stars, and Vega, which has hung nearly overhead through so many pleasant warm evenings, is one of my favorites up there. Orion and the Pleiades are forever associated with the voluble lover of Locksley Hall, who gazed on them through love-sick eyes from his ivied casement. Venus doubtless presided over the fortunes of Hardy's smitten astronomer in his picturesque nocturnal romance of "Two on a Tower." In the long run—and theirs is surely a long run—the far-sighted stars witness a good many strange doings on our little foot-stool. Above the big New England towns, for instance, they see a broad pallid glare in the atmosphere, the reflection of thousands of electric lamps; while between these centres, rushing headlong through the darkness, rumbling, fiery-

eyed, snake-like monsters crawl over the country; up and down the bays and sounds ply giant night-birds, the regular throbbing of whose watery pinions is carried afar by the wind. In the city interminable lines of gas-lamps, yellow and flickering, cast their unsteady reflections on the black pavements; colored lights of car and shop make festive bouquets of brilliancy; and when passing showers have wet the streets, the black cabs shine resplendent in their moist varnish. "It was but yesternight," says Castor to Pollux, "that the sunless side of yon busy sphere slept while we watched; now is it become owlsh, and insomnia turns it inside out. It matters little; let the worldlings fret; their speck will be consumed in a million years and blotted out. 'Tis well: I hate to shine on sordid fools. The experiment of placing men on that star has turned out ill."

"Wherefore concluded so rashly, neighbor? Perhaps the sun fails to warm and cheer the day-side of all that hapless ball, and man is driven to brighten his sleeping time by factitious rays."



“Aye, but I hear that the race has cut down trees to build ugly houses withal; fouled the rivers; made huge towns of brick; painted bad pictures; set up kings; maintained armies and navies, and waged bloody wars for conquest; and finally that it now worships the base metal called gold so fervently that, the day not being long enough, it turns night into day by fiendish

arts to pursue its cult. Decidedly the experiment has failed. Look now at Aldebaran: no men there! the trees and rivers are unspoiled, there are no houses nor towns, no bad pictures, armies, navies, kings, nor wars; in fact, nothing but universal peace and sobriety, since man has never been nor ever will be there."



"True, most sapient Castor, many sad deeds are done on that star; yet I have been told a time was when the arts were living forces there, and one man there was in particular who, like a lantern in a shadowy place, made their rude,

dull ways glorious. It may be that many before him had perceived how life is born of contrasts, so that darkness gives worth to light; but the world waited for this man to reveal in its completeness the mystic poetry of the dark. He touched with no uncertain hand a minor chord, till then mute, which vibrated with a melancholy melodiousness; and the world discovered through Rembrandt's art that night no less than day was clothed in beauty; the half-seen held its potent suggestions of loveliness; and rich gems of the imagination could be dug from the dim mines of evening. It was this sombre Dutch recluse, in fine, who first found a material rhyme and correspondence for the twilight mood of the soul."





THE BEAUTY OF COMMON THINGS.

TO eyes rightly trained, common things are as beautiful as any conceivable grand, splendid, extraordinary objects in the world; but because the faculty of observation is either wholly or almost undeveloped in the vast majority of individuals, this truth seems incomprehensible to most men, and must probably always remain so. The reason that artists are happy beings, in spite of whatever want of appreciation and encouragement may be their lot, is chiefly this: that they draw enjoyment from a

source inaccessible to the mass of mankind, but for them inexhaustible, eternal, without price. The extent to which the faculty of seeing form and color in Nature may be cultivated, appears as boundless as the relish for the exercise of it ; so that a lifetime is all too short for the study. It is a road which lengthens out before us as we advance, with constant variety in its vistas, fresh delights each hour, and new worlds to conquer from day to day. The ardent spirit of the student animates the artist to the end of his career ; he is always learning ; and knowledge, which is power, is also his greatest pleasure. This ruling passion fills his cup to the brim. Corot, in his last moments, grasped in fancy a brush, and cried out, " How beautiful ! " saying he had never seen such admirable landscapes.¹ I have a notion that the old man is still painting landscapes somewhere. The appreciation of Nature grows by what it feeds on, and becomes an instinct and an enduring love.

¹ Dumesnil, "Souvenirs intimes de Corot." Troyon and Michel, in their final delirium, had similar visions of incomparably fine landscapes.

The cockney sees nothing to look at in the country, and by the same law the animals that live in Mammoth Cave have no eyesight. To a whole and healthy temperament, everything in the world is interesting, and there is nothing so mean but it has some qualities worth observing. Art is intensely democratic, as well as immensely aristocratic. It is for the few, the elect, to comprehend in its fulness ; but its sympathies are world-wide and all-embracing. This need be no paradox : let us look into things as well as on their surface. Is there a dividing line between beauty and ugliness ? Sometimes it seems doubtful. Homely things are unutterably fine when looked at through sympathetic spectacles. Sacred associations beautify and enrich the wrinkled features of age, and sanctify the crumbling walls of the humble cottage. Memory tints with divine hues some of the most forlorn and obscure corners of the earth. I have seen a painting of a pig-pen which was truly handsome, and it did not need to lie to be so. When Ruskin referred contemptuously to Murillo's "Beggar Boy" in the Louvre, as an evi-

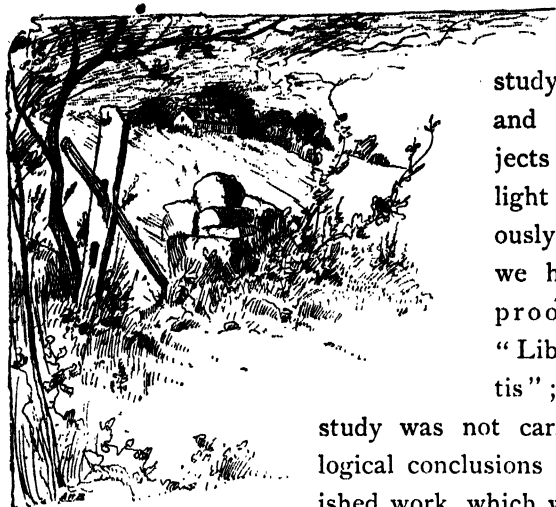
dence of the painter's love of dirt, he betrayed a strain of English philistinism in his own make-up which he has been ready enough to condemn in



his compatriots. Tróyon made known his wish to make a sketch of a certain heifer ; and when the well-pleased owner washed and groomed the

animal for the occasion, the painter was so disgusted that he refused to paint her picture at all. Priggishness and prudery are more vulgar and more hateful, in the light of art, than any other forms of affectation. All artificiality is at war with Nature, and art too. The secret of beauty is fitness. Whatever is in the scene should belong there. There is nothing superfluous in the woods and fields: everything has its place and is adapted to its part.

Though the beauty of common things is no modern discovery, we are constantly under the necessity of justifying to ourselves by the light of to-day our re-discoveries and re-castings of old truths; and in landscape-painting, the practice of this age has departed more widely from the track of tradition than in most other departments of the art. Landscape in the days of the Carracci was mainly employed as background for figures, and a stretch of far hills usually sufficed, details, with occasional exceptions, being neither desired nor desirable. When figures and buildings in turn became accessories to landscape in Claude's time, the



study of trees and other objects in outdoor light was seriously begun, as we have ample proof in the "Liber Veritatis"; but this

study was not carried to its logical conclusions in the finished work, which was a glow-

ing synthesis, or abstract vision, in which the distance drew the eye towards a golden dream-land, and nothing seemed near and familiar. On the other hand, the Dutchmen, who were nothing if not close to the ground, so to say, painted the brown dirt, the gray tree-trunks and rocks, the blue and white skies of their country, with such loyalty, sturdy unadorned truth, and soundness of workmanship, that the most admirable externals of modern landscape-painting may be

said to be their inventions, which, in common with many valuable inventions, are so simple that it seems surprising that no one had thought of them before. Constable was not slow to catch his cue, and to adapt the excellent foreign formulæ to English conditions; and all the France of 1830, thrilling with a new impulse, turned promptly to the ways of Nature, and inaugurated such a prodigious revival of landscape art that the receding waves of its influence have reached even these distant shores.

The art has grown nearer to Nature and less conventional. Among the most remarkable changes in the practice of it is that from the representation of the general to the particular, from the scenic and the panoramic to the intimate and actual. It is less picturesque and more studied. There is less interest in the distance and more in the foreground. Men were wont to run off to the Alps, the Andes, Niagara, for stupendous views; now they paint their own village dooryards. I confess to enjoying both classes of subjects, but with a positive preference for the modest dooryard; for

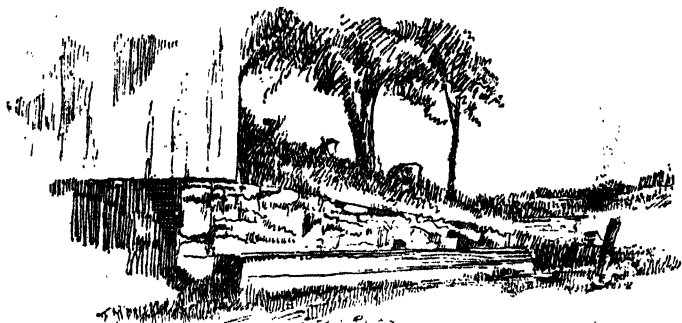
there can be no doubt that is difficult enough for most of our talents, and that artists nowadays study very hard.



If New England rural life is in any manner barren, it is because the people make it so ;

but let us not be too ready to accept the popular literary view of the matter. The Yankee character, Lowell says, has wanted neither open maligners, nor even more dangerous enemies in the persons of those unskilful painters who have given to it that hardness, angularity, and want of proper perspective, which in truth belonged, not to their subject, but to their own niggard and unskilful pencil. The same may be said of the outside aspects of the country in which Mr. Biglow lives. It is good to guard against falling into the heresy that the familiar scenes are ugly because they are familiar. Insist on it that beauty is everywhere; for so it is; aye, even the toad, ugly and venomous, "wears yet a precious jewel in his head." Not only the hills and mountains, plains and valleys, woods and groves, brooks and rivers, bays and cliffs, flowers and weeds, ponds and lakes, greens and gardens, highways and byways, bushes and vines, cascades and pools, and all the natural objects in New England, but also the houses, barns, sheds, fences, bridges, mills, railroads, steamboats, wharves, taverns, stores, meeting-

houses, burial-grounds, wagons, ploughs, barn-yards, beehives, pig-pens, hen-coops ; in a word, all that man has added to the scene should deserve the study of the realist who looks with his own eyes, regardless of what conventionalism calls prosaic, vulgar, and commonplace.



These things are of the soil, and distinguish our landscape from that of France or England : thus if a man with the lofty soul, loyal nature, and tender sympathy of a Jean François Millet should one day paint rustic New England somewhat with the spirit in which he painted rustic

France, I for one would very much like to see the results, and would not be astonished if he touched a very soft place in the American heart. "We are immersed in beauty, but our eyes have no clear vision," said the Concord seer. The man who makes us see it where we saw none before, is our benefactor.

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN LAND- SCAPE ART.

IN his noble essay on Art, Emerson says that no man can quite emancipate himself from his age and country : "It is in vain that we look for genius to reiterate its miracles in the old arts ; it is its instinct to find beauty and holiness in new and necessary facts, in the field and roadside, in the shop and mill." It has occurred to some of the most completely alienated sons of America that "it's a wretched business, this virtual quarrel of ours with our own country, this everlasting impatience to get out of it."¹ And as Rowland "looked along the arch of silvered shadow and out into the lucid air of the American night . . . he felt like declaring that here was beauty too — beauty sufficient for an artist not to starve upon it."

¹ "Roderick Hudson," by Henry James.

This has a charming touch of condescension in it, of that condescension which formed the text for one of the finest essays in the language, prompted by righteous indignation, and having in it the ring of manly independence and hearty



patriotism. Then here is another quotation to illustrate my theme: it is from Edward Strahan's whimsical account of his wanderings abroad, "The New Hyperion," in which he remarks that there are two things the American-born, however long a resident abroad, never forgives the lack of in Europe, — the

perpetual street-mending of an American town, and the wooden bridges. "Far away," he writes, "in my native meadows gleams the silver Charles : the tramp of horses' hoofs comes to my ears from the timbers of the bridge. *Here*, with a pelt and a scramble, your bridge is crossed ; nothing addresses the heart from its stony causeway. But the low, arched tubes of wood that span the streams of my native land are so many bass-viol, sending out mellow thunders with every passing wagon, to blend with the rustling stream and the sighing woods. Shall I never hear them again?" This strikes me as a very pretty touch of sentiment, but it is quoted mainly to prove how true Emerson's words are, that no man can quite emancipate himself from his country.

In the incomparable month of October, "the golden month, when the morning air tastes pure and sweet, and the trees have donned their splendid fall attire ; when a thin blue haze veils the far brown hills and the russet groves, and the roads are carpeted with a rich occidental rug of dead leaves which rustles crisply under

foot ; when the days growing shorter make themselves most regretted ; and the chill which descends with the coming of dusk hints of frosts ; when the odor of brush-fires fills the sharp air with its suggestion of November's harsher grip ; and small boys make the



woods resound with the eager outcries of the chestnut-hunter, — in these October days there is no country like this New England of ours. Words are but poor things to describe what any

one may see of its store of beauty. There are delightful quiet villages perched on airy hilltops, overlooking panoramas of vast compass, bounded by range upon range of mountains so distant that their undulating outlines



of pale blue almost melt into the sky; Here are the quaint homes of a frugal, contented, simple people, who have no histories, and so must be happy; there are ocean-like stretches of forest, solitudes of a well-nigh primeval silence, broken by singing streams, great sheets of water whose names recall the aborigines;

farmhouses which look thoroughly like homes, as permanent as the hills on which they stand, and as congenial with their surroundings as the trees and rocks: not like intruders and impertinences, they form parts of the landscape, and are more than mere irrelevancies and warts upon it. For as there is no nonsense about Nature, a sensible building, however plain, always harmonizes with it. Does not good sense form the durable base of all good art? This is the explanation of the fact that wherever in New England enlightenment builds its home, there is now a return to solidity of construction, simplicity of form, and the wise adaptation of means to end. Thus, from the æsthetic point of view, New England is growing more and more attractive every year. As the taste for country life becomes stronger among refined people, this improvement will be more marked. There is a fine significance in the good old adage that God made the country, and man made the town.

The early stages of æsthetic education are naturally attended by some painful barbarities,

but we cannot afford to despise any steps, however tottering, in that direction. The feminine instinct for decoration is a force which must be counted upon in this struggle. If the father is proud of his daughter's skill in the so-called ornamentation of screens and plaques, it is quite possible that his grandchildren may start in life with a snug capital of good taste. After another generation or two, the arts of design will be regarded as something more than child's play, and will stand at least on a par with banking, railroading, wool, and leather. There is a vast deal of good sense among the "common people," as the politicians call them, and, now that we are beginning to get over our hurry, and to realize that time and art are both long, and consequently that anything worth doing at all is worth doing well, the inquiry is often made, What is the quarrel between the artists and the public? which party is in the right? and why don't Americans back up their artists? These are interesting questions, which are not easily answered in a satisfactory way, but I shall try to suggest one of the chief causes of

the trouble and the means by which it may be overcome.

The main quarrel between the people at large and the artists is that the artists are at heart Europeans. Is there not ground for this belief? To ninety-nine of every hundred Americans it means more than a mere lack of patriotism too : it means something like dilettanteism ; and when you look at certain works of art so-called, this suspicion seems only too well founded. This being still a tremendously busy country, and very much in earnest, anything of that sort is especially detestable. I shall be told that there is narrow-mindedness and prejudice back of this feeling, and that may be very true. Patriotism is a narrow-minded virtue, but who would be the man without a country?

If there be one thing absolutely certain about the future of our art, it is this : that it must be more and more American. It can never amount to much without sending its roots deeper and deeper down into our own native soil. The familiar talk about the European art atmosphere is becoming tiresome cant. The time is come

to forswear Rome, Paris, and London, and give our energies to our country. This is more than mere sentimentality; it is policy, it is reason, it is logic. Athens and Tokio made their atmosphere by staying at home. Here, at home,



where we were born, we are to fight out our battles, nowhere else; and if ever we are to have a national art, this is the ground from which it must grow. Paris and Munich and Antwerp have done about all they can for us. The babe must be weaned, and learn to trust his own legs too. America is the place for Americans, and

being an artist does not make one an exception to this rule.

To paint our country well, we must first love it well; to love it we have but to know it, and to know it we must live in it. With new matter must come a new manner. As the treatment should be adapted to the distinctive peculiarities of the theme, not only our American subjects, but the style of description also, must be our own. A man cannot be quite ingenuous in his work when he is constantly looking over his shoulder to see how others do theirs. As for the approval of foreigners, the surest way to secure the respect of the world is to respect ourselves.

Let the American artist go forth alone, in the fields, in the woods, on the rivers, and forget that any man has lived, looked, loved, and painted before him. Let him abjure all the inflexible recipes of the academy, unlearn all uncongenial imported rules, throw away his useless baggage of preconceptions; let him strive not to consider so much how his picture will look as how the subject does look; let him look longer and

paint less;—is not this a serious business?
The way to create a personal style is not to
think of the style so much as the matter.
Take a good shot at the truth, and lo! you
have brought down beauty.



Let the heart yearn for the end, and the head will find the means. Let the passion to publish deeply felt truths move the intellect, and inspire the obedient hand. What is needed is the uncounterfeitable candor, the touching ingenuousness, the holy and great-hearted simplicity of the Raphaels and Angelicos of old —

not borrowed from them, but born anew, here and now, out of totally different conditions ; and if it be not too chimerical, might not an Ameri-



can sky and an American hillside, painted with the love and piety that they should evoke, give a sensation as fine and produce an impression as durable as was ever derived from classic canvas inspired by fifteenth century faith ?

ARABIAN DAYS.

Art has no country, it has been said, and truly its essence is universal; but so long as men have homes and associations which are more or less precious to them, why not paint the subjects they know and love? Destiny casts each man's lot in a certain place, for some purpose; well for him if he can say, This is the best place for me to live and die; for saying so, he creates his own paradise.

It is impossible for a wanderer to be original; when he is in Rome, he must do as the Romans. Our chameleon-like adaptability makes us peculiarly susceptible to foreign influences, for we have little or none of the lofty independence of our British forefathers. It must be allowed that we are clever at imitation, but it is a pitiable distinction. How would it do to try staying at home awhile?

